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CYNTHIA'S REBELLION

CYNTHIA'S REBELLION

BY

A. E. THOMAS

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1904

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CYNTHIA'S REBELLION

I

HERE I am, my dear Ralph, back in this blissful country that I love so well, and already partly committed to a doubtful enterprise of which I had never dreamed when I left Paris, or if, perchance, I dreamed of it, I sighed when I awoke as sighs a man who has dreamed a beautiful dream that he knows will never come true.

I am going to tell you, from time to time, just what goes on. Yes, you shall know the worst, and, that I may be accurate and truthful, which you know is my constant purpose, except at times, you shall know it promptly on the heels of the event. You know how kind Miss Caroline has invariably been to me—almost like a second mother—well, she's just the same as ever. We were so glad to see each other once more—she kissed me when we met—and then she spoke of you. If you were here

she would be quite content, and so, you know, would I.

"'Tis the place and all around it, as of old, the curlews call."

Only it's the bitterns, instead, that do the calling hereabouts. Yes, Belleville is just what it was in the sweet June weather a year ago. Need I say more?

Miss Caroline began to mould my destiny—you know she was always at it (bless her heart!)—immediately after breakfast to-day when we sought the breezy shade of the broad veranda.

"As an old friend of your mother," she began, with hesitation.

"Ha!" said I, somewhat melodramatically, I fear. "Ha! the Philistines are upon me."

"I beg your pardon?" inquired the dear spinster, with some warmth. I fixed an injured gaze upon the landscape.

"She begs my pardon," I confided to it, "when she knows perfectly well that whenever she has something particularly disagreeable to say to me she always prefaces it with an allusion to her early attachment to my mother."

Miss Caroline sniffed, took a sip from a tall thin glass, from which, as she raised it, came the seductive tinkle of cracked ice.

"I was about to say, when I was so rudely interrupted," she went on imperturbably, "that as an old friend of your mother I should take the liberty of telling you that it is high time you were getting married."

"What! Again?" I groaned.

"Don't be more ridiculous than usual. You know you have never been married."

"You have doubtless," I observed, "heard that excellent proverb which deals with the line of conduct recommended regarding the disposal of flinty missiles by persons so unfortunate as to reside in houses constructed of transparent and brittle materials."

Miss Caroline smiled. Her smile, as you know, is one of the many things people love her for.

"My house," she retorted, amiably, "though it may be composed of glass, is set upon a hill."

"All the better mark," I cried, triumphantly.

"On the contrary," she replied, "if you will employ the intellect for which people give you credit, you will perceive that I, on my lofty eminence of age, am quite beyond the reach of casual marksmanship, while I have but to touch with my foot a rolling stone when, gathering no moss, it crashes down upon the head of my un-

fortunate target." I rubbed my own pate apprehensively.

"Then," said I, "I am supposed to be suffering from concussion of the brain?"

"You are supposed to be wandering from the subject," said Miss Caroline, severely.

"Well," I replied, ruefully, "if you'll be so good as to have my glass filled again, I don't mind saying that it's rather hard lines to have my misfortunes flung in my face."

"Did you use the plural?" inquired my mentor.

"I said misfortunes," I replied, tartly.

"Hm!" murmured Miss Caroline, retrospectively. "I was under the impression . . ." I had no idea of allowing the conversation to take this definite turn. Consequently, I broke in:

"Besides, you know very well that I am wedded to my art." Miss Caroline stared politely.

"Your what?" she said.

"My art—my art," I repeated, obstinately. Miss Caroline set down her glass.

"John," she said, "you know I'm talking for your good."

"Yes," I said, reminiscently of my boyhood, "yes, it hurts you more than it does me—I know—go on."

"I won't be talked down," cried Miss Caroline. "It's just selfishness on your part—just selfishness, and not another blessed thing. Here you are—getting on toward—well, how old are you, anyway?"

"Miss Caroline," I said, with scandal in my voice, "you surprise me—yes, you really do."

"Rubbish!" and she stamped her foot. "Answer me."

"Well," I replied, with an air of surrender, "you tell me that I ought to get married, and I answer that I'm old enough—to know better." Miss Caroline glared.

"John Kenton," she said, "sometimes you almost make me wash my hands of you."

"I don't like the metaphor," said I.

"You deserve it," said she. "You are enough to drive one to despair. For—well, for years I've done my best for you, and here you are at thirty—disgustingly single. I've filled my house with pretty, rich, and sensible girls——"

"Who ever heard," I interrupted, cynically, "of a pretty, rich, and sensible girl? 'Pon my word, your gift of exaggeration——"

"And here you are," she hurried on, indignantly, "rich—lazy—selfish——"

"Oh! come!" I cried.

"Well, you are rich, aren't you?"

"Say comfortably well-to-do."

"You surely can't deny you're lazy."

"Leisurely is a vastly nicer word—besides, I travel—and—and—then there are my water-colors."

"Oho!" she snorted—yes, she did. "That's your *art!* I suppose." Not finding a convenient hole in which to hide my miserable person, I ventured timidly:

"Anyhow, you have done me the honor to hang one of 'em in your perfectly delightful house."

"Come to the third count," she said, sternly.

"If it comes to selfishness, my dear Miss Caroline," said I, obstinately, "it is perfectly well known and generally admitted by thinking people that love is, in the last analysis, a selfish passion."

"Oh, Lord!" she cried, and stormed off to the other end of the broad veranda. I gazed after her retreating figure in mild surprise. Miss Caroline began to pluck the climbing roses that fragrantly covered the trellis.

"I think," said I, "that I will go for a stroll. I suppose the Pictured Rocks are still there." Miss Caroline came back and stood over me.

"I did think once," she said, solemnly, "that I had got rid of you."

"Fellow-citizens," said I, with a spread-eagle gesture, "I thank you for this most flattering reception."

"I suppose you know whom I am referring to?" inquired Miss Caroline, steadfastly.

A speck of dust upon my sleeve demanded my undivided attention for a moment. I hate dust.

"Never use a preposition to end a sentence with," I said at length.

"I suppose," she repeated, defiantly and with emphasis, "that you know whom I am referring to?"

"No references required," said I, with what I hope was a fine assumption of cheerfulness. Of course, I may be wrong, but I thought I heard Miss Caroline sigh. She turned away and resumed her chair.

"What is so rare—" she began.

"Miss Caroline," I cried, contritely, "would you be very much displeased if I called you an old dear?"

"Whose fault was it?" she asked, smiling mistily.

"At all events," I replied, "it was my misfortune. Girls are, at times, so singularly unappreciative."

"Oyster!" she laughed, dolefully.

"And there are no R's in June," I said. "Isn't that your carriage?" I pointed down the yellow, winding road. Miss Caroline's glass tinkled again.

"Ah! yes, I believe it is," she answered, innocently.

"Coming from the station?" I inquired, with quick suspicion. When Miss Caroline gets ostentatiously innocent why, stand from under—that's all.

"Hm! yes, I suppose so," she admitted. "I am expecting an arrival," she added, as if it had just occurred to her. I fixed my eyes upon the approaching carriage.

"I should judge," said I, observing the glimmer of a pink parasol, "that yon princely equipage contains a lady."

"You were always so acute," cooed Miss Caroline. The carriage turned in at the gate. I sat up.

"I should judge," said I, sternly, "that the lady's face and form were those of—" Miss Caroline arose and looked me in the face.

"Cynthia Fenwick," she said, sweetly. I queried with a look.

"Of course, she's no idea you're here," said Miss Caroline, hurriedly.

"Of course not," I admitted with miserable

conviction. At the same time I furtively slipped a spray of forget-me-nots from the lapel of my coat and let it fall. The carriage was at the door. Miss Caroline and I descended to welcome the guest. I had not seen Cynthia since I left Lakewood in the winter on my way to join you at Paris. I was told subsequently that certain gossips had disseminated the impression that my business in Paris was to forget Cynthia. People will talk, you know.

When Cynthia kissed Miss Caroline I averted my gaze. I had my reasons. But I could not stop my ears.

"Why, it's Mr. Kenton," cried Cynthia, giving me her hand. Did I ever tell you about Cynthia's hand? It's—well—if you've ever seen it you know what it's like, and if you haven't I never could make you understand. At any rate, I dared to take it.

"Really," said Cynthia, "I'd no idea you were to be here."

"I can well believe that," said I.

"Heard you were back from Paris, though."

"Who could have been so kind?" I began.

"Newspapers. Oh! dear Miss Caroline, mamma was detained this morning. She sent her regrets and said I was to say she'd get down on the last afternoon train." Cynthia's eye be-

came fixed on the point of her pink parasol. So did mine. The point of the pink parasol was fixed upon those confounded forget-me-nots! Miss Caroline disappeared with an apology.

"Er—how is your charming mother?" I inquired, hastily.

"You do not appear to have altered," said Cynthia—"oh! mamma is very well. She will be so pleased to see you." My smile may have expressed some scepticism. It generally does, I've been told.

"Oh! do you think so?" said I. "Isn't it a pleasing prospect?"

"Eh?" said Cynthia, doubtfully.

"The view, I mean," I explained, indicating it with a wave of my hand.

"Oh! yes." Cynthia was plainly at a loss. She seemed vaguely distressed. Her eyes—did I ever tell you about Cynthia's eyes? Well, if you've seen them I've said enough, and if you haven't, I couldn't say enough. Anyhow, I couldn't endure that look, so I proceeded.

"Your respected mother," said I, "once gave me the most unpleasant five months of my life."

"What do you mean?" cried Cynthia, with a delectable frown. Ever see Cynthia frown?

"It is," said I, "a fact." Cynthia reflected

earnestly. With her right hand she began to caress the fingers of her left. I could not be sure that she was counting.

"Did you say five?" she asked at length, looking off over the valley to the hills beyond.

"One — two — three — four — five." Cynthia looked the picture of innocence. Apparently she lost all interest in the subject—and that was funny, too. She had seemed so interested a moment before.

"Lakewood," she said, indifferently, "was very dull last winter."

"Did you find it so?" I replied. "I do not remember that you seemed bored, and as for myself, I never found the place so entertaining. I was saying to your mother only the night before I left for the other side——"

"That was the night of the Hargises' ball," interrupted Cynthia, reminiscently.

"It was," said I, and relapsed into silence.

"You were saying to mamma?" she prompted at length.

"What your mamma was saying to me was much more to the point," I replied.

"So mamma made a few pointed remarks?"

"Since you wish to know," I said, decisively, "what she said to me——"

"Oh! but I don't—indeed, I don't," cried

Cynthia, rising from the bamboo chair in something perilously like a panic. I respected her mood. Again her eyes fell on those unfortunate forget-me-nots. As before, she poked them somewhat pointedly.

"I admit," said I, dolefully, "that they ought not to be there."

"Eh?" said Cynthia, raising her eyebrows innocently.

"As a matter of fact," I went on, ignoring the evasion, "when you came up the drive I was wearing them."

"Yes?" she murmured, with polite indifference, turning away. It was quite annoying.

"I took them off," I continued, with fatuous insistence, "because I—er—happened—at the moment—to remember that they were your favorite—" I observed that Cynthia's shoulders were agitated, and in my wrath I stopped. In a moment she laughed. It isn't much to say, but it's something quite different to hear. When Cynthia laughs she positively tinkles! Yes, by Jove! she does.

"Silly Jack!" she said, smothering her ambrosial mirth.

Now it never had occurred to me before, but all at once it came over me that "silly" was the most beautiful word in the English lan-

guage. However I could have stumbled along my empty etymological life so long without recognizing the singular beauty of that dissyllable is something that stumps me even now.

"Cynthia!" I said, advancing. What more I might have said is not at all to the point, for at that moment Miss Caroline appeared. Miss Caroline means well, but of course she's not omniscient.

"You'll just have time to dress for luncheon," she announced.

"Oh! very well," said Cynthia. She floated to the open door and stopped.

"Oh, Mr. Kenton?" she said.

"Yes?" said I.

"You're quite sure it was five months?"

"I can give you the exact number of days, if you like," said I.

She vanished, and I heard her gentle laugh go tinkling up the great stairs.

"Oh, John!" said Miss Caroline. I returned to myself with a start. "I expect other guests to-night. They include Polly Cheatham—you remember her?"

"Golfs, doesn't she?"

"That's the girl," went on Miss Caroline, "and Mrs. Denton-Gibbs, and, of course, Mrs. Fenwick and—and—Reggie Langham."

My glass was half way to my lips. I set it down.

"Pleasant breeze here," said I.

"I—I had to do it," faltered Miss Caroline. I regarded the scenery at length.

"It's true, then, what I've heard about him and—and—Cynthia," I said, after a time.

"Yes," sighed Miss Caroline, miserably.

"Then," said I, somewhat rudely, "what the deuce did you ask me here for? Why the dickens didn't you tell me before? Have you got a time-table?"

Jarvis was just passing through the hall. Miss Caroline sent him for the railway-guide.

"John," said Miss Caroline, "I may have done wrong, but occasionally I take it into my poor, sinful old head to meddle with a plan upon which Heaven and two mammas have, without consulting me, agreed." I said nothing, though speech was obviously expected of me.

"John," said Miss Caroline, "it's my opinion that you are something of a fool."

I preserved the silence of the lost.

"I wrote you as much when you went to Paris in January," she continued.

"Your people make a good julep," I remarked judicially, picking up my glass once more. Miss Caroline grew red in the face.

"Pshaw! Pshaw!" she cried, disgustedly.

"The time-table, sir," said Jarvis.

"Thanks, Jarvis," said I, indifferently, "but you may take it away."

"Ah!" said Miss Caroline, and heaved a great, contented sigh.

"No, really," I said, "this julep's not at all bad—not at all, upon my word."

Then we went in to luncheon.

That will be all for now, I think. Hoping you are the same Ralph, I am the same

J. K.

II

My dear Ralph:

Events move on wings of light hereabouts, which excuses, or will in your sight, I am sure, this letter following so soon upon the heels of its immediate predecessor. A man in love must have a confidant, and the lot falls upon your unlucky head. Epistolary confidences have one great advantage over verbal ones, because if the confidant be bored, the waste-basket is, like a lie, a never-failing help in time of trouble, and at the same time the heart surcharged with emotion finds the longed-for relief. On the other hand, if the confidences be verbal, the unfortunate auditor becomes a sort of Prometheus chained to the rock of friendship for the benefit of the vultures of boredom. Congratulate yourself, therefore, upon your absence.

Mrs. Fenwick (bless her dear heart!—perhaps) arrived in time for dinner, as she threatened. When first her favored glance rested upon my intelligent features she turned on a kinetoscope smile that would not have deceived a Don Quixote.

"Oh!" she babbled, as gay as a churchyard. "Why, it's Mr. Kenton. This is such a pleasant surprise." You know what original things Mrs. Fenwick is always saying.

"On the other hand," I replied, sweetly, "Miss Caroline's most attractive lure to me was the promise of your presence. My last conversation with you was of such a delightful character."

I ought not to have said it, I know. Considering what my plans are, it behooves me to remove all suspicion from that maternal bosom. But I couldn't resist the temptation to make her squirm. And she did squirm, too. We're all poor worms, you know.

You may think that the enterprise upon which I am embarked requires some defence. Well, then, here it is. I have come to the conclusion that I have been a bigger fool than any in my extensive acquaintance of defectives. More I cannot say. Miss Caroline is perfectly right. Nobody could see Cynthia and doubt it. Who but an addle-pated idiot would accept the information gratuitously offered by a worldly, cold-blooded, hostile old female parent that he had not the phantom of a chance against an arrangement already agreed upon by the two families and about to be made public? I never

told you about that before, did I? Fact is, as soon as I had acted upon my imbecile impulse I was heartily ashamed of it. After a while, I wrote a letter, but I never got an answer. Why, I don't know. I did think it was because none was written, but since I've seen dear Mrs. Fenwick I'm not so sure. But I mean to find out.

Of course, you may say (and it's the usual thing to say) that I've no business poaching on another man's preserves. And I haven't, if they really are the other chap's. I don't deny they're in his name at present, but I mean to investigate his title; I mean to find out whether such a friendless orphan as I has been the victim of a band of polite bunco-steerers or not. I think I have grounds for thinking that I've been done.

Ordinarily that suspicion alone would be sufficient to arouse my utmost ire; but consider, O friend of my youth and fellow-sower of wild oats, if I have been done, what I've been done out of! You haven't seen Cynthia since she was at the pigtail age, but you must take my word for it that if I've been done, no man was ever done out of anything more necessary to his happiness.

I won't go into particulars. It wouldn't mean

anything for me to tell you that she has gold-bronze hair and Russian-violet eyes, that she is tall and graceful, and strong and supple, and tender and direct, and subtle and frank, and incomprehensible and melting, and distant and gay and grave, and logical and whimsical, and ineffably dear and delectable in all of these. Wherefore I won't tell you anything of the sort. But you must see by this time that if my suspicions are correct it is time for me to put up what Billy Edwards would call "de scrap of my life."

Did I hear you say, "a little late, isn't it? Why didn't you have it out before?" To this annoying but sensible inquiry I can only reply that a man is, in one particular, like a horse. They both go crazy at least once in their lives, and you never can tell when it is coming. When I was a lad at Pittsfield my grandfather went out one summer day for a drive with old white Jerry. Jerry was the last word in equine conservatism. The "armless wonder" could drive him through a boiler-shop with "perfect impurity," as Artie Gibbs says.

Well, on this occasion, grandfather and Jerry arrived at a railroad crossing and obligingly stopped in deference to a train. Jerry had taken thousands of dreamless naps under pre-

cisely identical circumstances. Yet on this occasion he suddenly denied his entire past, reared, fell over backward on the dashboard, kicked the wagon to pieces, and ran four miles before he came to himself. He never did such a thing before. He never did such a thing again. Why he did it then, Heaven knows. I think grandfather had it about right, though. When called upon for an explanation, he said: "I reckon Jerry wanted to prove that he was only human."

Well, I can only account for my incredible asininity upon the same theory. It is true that we (isn't that the grandest word in this wide, beautiful world when used in the proper connection) had had a slight misunderstanding. It didn't amount to anything in itself. It was about an agreement I thought we had made to go driving the following morning. It seems I was mistaken. She had, on the contrary, promised to go golfing. That was all very well, though tiresome enough, but the man with whom she was to golf turned out to be Reggie Langham. A mere trifle, you say? Of course, you are right and I am wrong, as you usually are, as Ben Butler remarked in apologizing to a judge, but, taken in connection with the maternal warning-off which I received that same

cheerful evening, it was enough to unhinge my reason. But Richard is himself again, and he means to know what's what if it is the last official act of his misspent career.

Now, dear old chap, perhaps you're thinking that all this indicates that a man may go crazy not only once, but twice in a lifetime. You're saying, "Here's a man goes off and leaves a girl whom he loves because he's told by her mother that she's practically engaged to another man. When he comes back after an absence of five months and finds that the engagement has actually been announced and that the thing's fixed, as he had been told it would be, he promptly comes to the astounding conclusion that he has been betrayed, that the girl doesn't love the man she's engaged to, and that he's going to raise the very devil about it. Verily, the end of that man is Mr. Dooley's 'brain college.'"

But, my boy, you haven't seen Langham; you haven't (and accept my felicitations) seen Mrs. Fenwick, and (ah! most miserable of mortals!) you haven't seen Cynthia.

As I wrote the last word of the preceding sentence a sudden radiance stole through the library. I continued to look at her name as I had written it to you, but I knew that the radi-

ance was Cynthia. Then I carefully blotted the sheet.

Cynthia came noiselessly in and took the reading-chair on the other side of the table.

"Correspondence heavy this morning?" she asked, putting on her gloves. I could hear Langham's voice exhorting a restless horse as the beast pawed the driveway.

"I am writing," said I, "to the best chap I know." Thus do gentlemen perjure themselves for no cause whatever.

"And who's that?" cried Cynthia.

"His name is Ralph Burton."

"I remember him," said Cynthia, and then she said something which I will not repeat, because I hate conceited persons.

"I do so love to read the letters men write each other," she went on. "They simply reek with sincerity."

"And aren't you always sincere?" said I.

"It's an impertinent question," she answered, "but—but—I'm afraid I'm not." As I tried to digest this last phrase, she went on, leaning over the corner of the table toward me:

"Do read me something of what you've written. Do you think it's awfully rude of me?" Rude! Of those eyes! Well, now!

"Cynthia," said I (it was the first time I had

called her that since the Lakewood days), "if I can find a paragraph in which you are likely to be interested, it will give me the greatest pleasure in the world." With that I read her that yarn about Jerry.

"That's queer, too," she said when I had finished. "But what do you mean—well, never mind." At this point Jarvis appeared.

"Beg pardon, Miss," said he, "but Mr. Langham sends his compliments and wishes to know how soon he may expect you."

"Presently—presently," cried Cynthia, waving the man off with what I hope was an accent of slight annoyance.

"Were you about to inquire," I said, "when it was that I went crazy?" She nodded—a quick, mischievous toss of her dainty head.

"Oh! it was at Lakewood," I said, carelessly.

"Last winter?" asked my lady.

"Last winter."

"Were you as crazy as Jerry?"

"Worse—much worse."

"Did you rear and fall over backward and kick the wagon to pieces and—and——"

"Not exactly," I replied; "but"—here I looked at Cynthia—"I bolted." Cynthia robbed me of her glance.

"Far?" she murmured.

"About three thousand miles," said I. Cynthia gave her undivided attention to her gloves.

"Was it a nice runaway?" she inquired at length.

Here was my chance.

"I think I had the honor of informing you once," I replied, "that it was not at all a nice runaway."

"Oh! to be sure! so you did," twirling her parasol. "To which I replied, expressing—well, expressing my sympathy."

"You did!" I cried, hurriedly rising. "Oh! Cynthia! did you really?" There was a sinister rustle of skirts in the hall. Cynthia got quickly to her feet.

"Such a funny answer, wasn't it?" she laughed. Her back was to the door and her eyes warned me. Mrs. Fenwick's ample figure blocked the entrance.

"My dear," she announced with acid sweetness, "Mr. Langham is waiting" (we had heard him waiting) "and the horse is very restless." She smiled a deadly smile at me.

"I was just going, mamma," replied Cynthia, demurely. "Mr. Kenton was telling me such an amusing story. You really must ask him to tell it to you, mamma." With a mischievous glance from the doorway, she was gone.

"I should be pleased," said Mrs. Fenwick, "to hear your story." She profaned the chair Cynthia had just blessed, and "looked pleasant." I haven't the least doubt in the world that she thought she had me stuck.

Not so! Horatio! Not so! I told her an ancient tale, especially adapted for the occasion. She listened to it with the face of a Chinese god!

"Extremely interesting, Mr. Kenton," she remarked when I had finished, fixing a stony gaze upon my wretched features. "But all the more reprehensible at a time when my future son-in-law was awaiting the coming of my daughter."

"Madam," said I, with a bow, "I am not responsible for the safe or speedy delivery of your daughter to your future son-in-law."

"Humph!" she snorted, with a glare of enmity nothing less than savage. "I quite believe that."

So you see we understand each other.

I never had less faith in heredity.

The battle is on. I know it isn't a sportsmanlike thing to implore outside assistance, but, if I thought prayers would do me any good, I should ask for yours.

Your faithful war correspondent,

JACQUES.

III

ALENE, DEAR:

I'm glad I came to Belleville. You may remember that I didn't care much about it in advance. I just love Miss Caroline, and the country is beautiful as never was, and all that, but I didn't expect much of the company. Truth to tell, I was somewhat bored with life, and desired distraction. Why is it people like distraction but aren't supposed to be having a bit good time when they're "quite distracted."

I don't deny, dear child, that there are advantages about being engaged. (This is entirely an academic discussion, understand.) For one thing, your future is supposed to be settled and "off your hands." You are supposed to regard the state of things with just the satisfaction you would feel if you had gotten a particularly annoying piece of work out of your way or laid a ghost or buried a family skeleton or something. Think, too, of the sweet serenity it brings into your mother's life to know that your "future is settled." Poor mam-

ma! I must have been a trial to her. She has earned the peace and quiet that has been hers since my engagement to Reggie was announced.

But there is another side to this oil-painting. Being an engaged girl has moments of monotony. At least it has for me. I'm neither one thing nor the other—neither married nor single—neither fish, flesh, nor fowl (though brother Jimmie does say I'm a bird). You know I never pretended to be madly infatuated with Reggie. He's a dear, good boy, and I like him, but I never could see any close resemblance between him and a little tin god on wheels. And he knows it. I told mamma, but she didn't seem distressed — said all that would come later, and I suppose maybe she knows. Reggie doesn't seem to mind, either, so perhaps it's the usual thing. Though, there's Clara Ellis and Dick Thorne. They can't see anybody but themselves. If Dick were to tell Clara that there had been a tidal wave that drowned everybody in the world but them, she would merely murmur, "Only fancy." "Perfectly ridiculous!" did you say? Hm-m! Yes, I suppose it is. Of course it's quite ridiculous. There was a time when I, too, was in danger of becoming quite as absurd as Clara Ellis. I sha'n't tell you when it was, since it's all over and done with,

and dead and buried and—and—forgotten. But wasn't it a lucky escape? Poor Clara!

Did I say that mamma had been having a lovely time of late? Well, that was very true. She arrived here in the best of spirits, but they didn't last long. I fear the air doesn't agree with her at Belleville. She seems nervous, distrait, and a bit ill-tempered. Indeed, I suggested a doctor, at which she seemed quite put out with me. I can't think why.

Oh! do you remember Mr. Kenton—John Kenton? Of course you do. Well, when I got here, lo! and observe, who should be the first person to greet me but Mr. John Kenton! What's that? Oh! yes, I believe I was once accustomed to call him Jack, as you say. But I am an engaged girl, and it is just possible Reggie wouldn't approve of it. Why, Alene, how can you suggest such a thing? I hope you don't think I would do anything without Reggie's approval.

Now, I never told you anything at all whatever in the least, yes, about this before yet, because—well—because. But I always thought there was something queer about it. You know how much Mr. Kenton and I used to be together—a good deal—well, almost as much as Reggie and I. Well, the night of the Hargis

ball at Lakewood in January, as mother and I were about to take our carriage, Mr. Kenton came to bid me good-night, and in doing so said that he should not be able to see me again soon because he had suddenly been "called abroad." Now, wasn't that a nice thing to say to a girl who—who knew him as well as I did. "Called abroad!" Of course, I should have asked him straight out what "called him abroad," if mother had not been there. But there she was. He left for Paris the very next day.

Some little time after I got a letter from him, oh! the snippiest letter you ever saw—formal and courteous, oh! disgustingly polite! —congratulating me upon my engagement to Reggie. But I wasn't engaged at the time, you know, and I wrote and told him so. Well, that's the last I heard of Mr. Kenton until yesterday.

Well, for some reason, mamma doesn't care for Mr. Kenton. She never did. I'm confident she wouldn't have come at all if she had known he was to be at Belleville. I don't know what she has against him, for he always took pains to be polite to her. Maybe he took too many pains. Anyhow she detests the ground he walks on, though she never said anything against him to me.

Mr. Kenton was writing a letter this morning when I passed the library to go driving with Reggie. I thought it only polite to pass the time of day while buttoning my gloves. Well, we got to chatting (I always did like Mr. Kenton's sort of talk. I suppose brother Jimmie would say he speaks the language of my tribe), and one thing led to another—it's a way they have, you know—until I got it out of him —I mean he told me that he never received the letter I wrote him in answer to his letter from Paris. At that his eyes opened (they're not bad eyes, either), and he said—oh! something or other—I believe he mentioned my Christian name. For this, of course, I was about to correct him, with some such harsh speech as "Sir!" or "My name is *Miss* Fenwick, if you please," when in walked mamma.

Naturally, I didn't wish her to know that Mr. Kenton and I were quarrelling, so I deferred my censure to another occasion and began to laugh, pretending that Mr. Kenton was just telling me a funny story. If my conduct needs defence, dear Alene, please remember poor mamma's bad nerves which I've just been telling you about. It was my filial duty not to give her anything more to worry about.

Mamma informed me that poor Reggie was

tearing his hair out by the roots (or words to that effect) waiting for me to go driving, and I departed after advising her to get Mr. Kenton to tell her that funny story. It was rather low down of me, too, but when I'm acting I like to add "the circumstantial details that lend an air of verisimilitude to an otherwise bald and unconvincing" performance.

Of course mamma, who, I regret to say, is not of a particularly guileless nature, promptly demanded the story. How do I know? Why, I heard her. I had scarcely passed outside the door when I burst a button off my glove, and, sending Marie for another pair, sat down in the hall to wait for them. You'd naturally suppose poor Mr. Kenton would have been "up against it." (Quotation marks mean brother Jimmie.) On the contrary, he was glibness itself, and as Marie was a long time getting the gloves, and I couldn't get away without running the risk of being heard and thus getting under the suspicion of eavesdropping, I heard the whole yarn. It's certainly bad to eavesdrop, but it's worse to be caught eavesdropping, especially when you're not eavesdropping. Am I lucid? Yes? Well, as nearly as I can remember, this was the tale that Mr. Kenton told mamma:

"Once upon a time, in a far-off kingdom, there was a princess of whom a young noble was deeply enamored. Though he had never mentioned his love to the object of his adoration, he was upon the point of doing so when he was informed by the Queen that a marriage had been arranged between the Princess and the scion of the royal family of an adjoining kingdom. Upon this, the unfortunate youth gat him thence into a far country, in the hope that he might forget his grief.

"Meantime, the Princess, to whom he had not even said farewell, wondered greatly at his absence. In due time there came to her by a trusty messenger a missive from the young noble. It matters not what was writ therein nor in the answer which the Princess despatched. Suffice it to say that that answer was never received. Some say that the messenger was waylaid by hired assassins incited by the wicked Queen. However that may be, after many moons the exiled youth returned to his own land." Here Mr. Kenton paused.

"Well, what next?" inquired mamma, in a voice which, I fear, was most unsympathetic.

"That's what the noble asked the Princess," replied Mr. Kenton, blandly.

Now, of course I don't know what that story

was all about. Of course I don't; but I do know that an icy atmosphere emanated from the library at its conclusion. Fortunately, Marie came down stairs with my gloves just then, and under cover of her arrival I made my escape.

Then the plot began to thicken. Reggie, it seems, was not pleased at my delay. He's not short-tempered as a rule, and I couldn't think what had upset him.

"You've been an awful time," he grumbled.

"No doubt it seemed so," I replied, with sweet irony, "because you were waiting for me. But you really ought to be willing to wait always for me, you know."

"What kept you so long, anyhow?" he persisted.

"Gloves," from me.

"Humph!" from Reggie. This nettled me a bit. I like enough backbone in a man to keep him from allowing himself to be imposed on, but I do not like the sulks, so I added:

"Besides, I was talking with Mr. Kenton."

"Ah!" said Reggie, with an accent I didn't like.

"What do you mean by that kind of an 'Ah'?" I said.

"Nothing," replied Reggie. "But I did think that you were never coming."

So you see Reggie pulled in his horns. But I got a glimpse of them, all the same. And, just between us girls, I didn't and I don't like that "Ah!"

Well, after that Reggie drove like Jehu and scarcely said a word. Coming up the drive, after a silence of half an hour (except for a word to ask me if I was cold), he blurts out this query:

"Don't you think it's time you set the day?" To tell the truth, he couldn't have chosen a more unpropitious moment. I didn't answer at once. I was thinking that it was very unlike Reggie. Then I recalled the fact that mamma and Reggie had had their heads together about something out on the porch directly after breakfast. "Har! Har!" says I to myself, says I. "Two and two, I believe, make four," I says. And to Reggie, I says, says I:

"Does mamma think so?"

"What's that to do with it?" he growled, trying to look innocent.

"Oh, Reggie," I remonstrated, looking shocked, "that's not nice of you. Beside, you know she put you up to it."

He hemmed and hawed and "Oh! rubbished!" awhile, but he's not a good liar, like me, and finally admitted that it was mamma's idea orig-

inally, but he insisted that he thoroughly approved.

I laughed and said I'd think it over, and, though he grumbled a good deal, that was the best I could do for him. You see, I was not in a particularly generous mood toward Reggie.

But, to be frank with you—I always am, you know—the idea itself, aside from the discipline due to Reggie's grouch (Jimmie again), did not, somehow, appeal to me. You must think me an inconsistent child, for was I not just now complaining of the monotony of the engaged state? And now I candidly own I'm in no hurry to leave it, at least not by the route proposed by Reggie.

Oh, dear Alene, please, please don't think me a horrid, horrid girl. I'm not a flirt—at least I'm not a horrid flirt. I'm not playing fast and loose with Reggie, and I don't mean to. But, somehow, somehow or other, I have a vague sense of something wrong—not with Reggie, but with myself. I can't rid myself of the notion that in some way I have missed something that I'm entitled to—something that is my birthright—something for which I came into the world and haven't found. I don't think I'm a particularly sentimental girl, do you? I have never cried my eyes out over the heroes of ro-

mance. Dad says I'm quite practical minded. He often asks my advice and takes it, too, which is more to the point.

In the nature of things, I ought to be looking forward to the future with glad anticipation. The world ought to be rosy, or look rosy, anyhow. I ought to have no doubts. I ought to be opening my arms to the future as if I couldn't get enough of it. I've been having a heart-to-heart talk with myself, and it's plain that I'm not as happy as I was six months ago, before my future was "settled" for me. For it was "settled" for me. I was quite passive through it all—I, the person most concerned. And now—now—that it's all arranged and the day draws near—for I can't put it off much longer—I—I have my doubts—yes—my dear, Cynthia has her doubts. They have been there all along, though I didn't really know it; but now — for — for some reason or other — they have risen up from their obscurity to confront me like shadows in the moonlight, and your Cynthia—yes, your Cynthia is appalled.

It is late, dear child. Through my open window comes the deep whisper of the surf as it breaks upon the shore two miles away. There is something ominous about it. Or is it just the midnight mood of YOUR CYNTHIA?

IV

My dear Alene:

Let me assure you that I haven't done a single blessed thing that I can rightly be blamed for, and yet my perverse little gods have managed to get me into disgrace—deep and dark and grisly. Yes, I'm disgraced with mamma and Reggie. I can't seem to do a thing to please them, and you know how hard I try—don't you? Please say you do.

The penetration for which you are so justly noted has doubtless informed you that it's all through Mr. Kenton—not that he voluntarily "went for to do it." Oh, dear no. I don't believe for a moment that he did. But I don't think he's overwhelmed with grief and contrition either. It is much to be feared that he has, in some ways, a callous nature. Otherwise he would be much cast down at mamma's obvious displeasure, wouldn't he? Which he isn't at all. Indeed, he's the most persistently sprightly person in the house. Aside from him and Polly Cheatham, who's a hopeless golfer and therefore *non compos* (Lat., see vocab.),

we are a dour household. Mamma is fairly smouldering and likely to erupt at any time. Reggie has the sulks worse than ever. Miss Caroline hovers about with ill-concealed anxiety, as well she may, for it's really all her fault (bless her heart!). Mrs. Denton-Gibbs is exercised about the amours of "sonnie," who appears, from what mamma tells me, matrimonially inclined in some undesirable direction at Bar Harbor, while I, of course you do not need to be told, am bowed down to mother earth beneath the load of repentance that Mr. Kenton ought, but gayly declines, to bear. This is how it happened:

It couldn't have been more than half an hour after sunrise when suddenly I was broad awake. My window was wide open, of course, and the scent of some huge rambler roses tempted me forth into the dewy morning. It is notorious that you don't know much about the dewy morning, but, take my word for it, it's not so worse (another Jimmie-ism). I always had a partiality for it. Somehow my most innocent fancies have always been my undoing.

My feet bore me unerringly across the little rustic bridge behind the house, up over the closely cropped hill where Miss Caroline's sheep feast themselves (Polly Cheatham says

it would make a "bully sporty course"), across two hay-fields, whose crop I fear I somewhat discouraged, to a stone wall that hedges a big lot that seems to be devoted principally to the culture of buttercups and bitterweed. I climbed to the top of the wall and sat there swinging my feet—a thing I particularly enjoy because mamma especially detests it. From the top of that stone wall you look out over a view that, in the June sunlight, is quite enchanting. The foreground is pastoral in the extreme—the broad field with its crop of exquisite weeds and a haystack of weather-battered brown in the middle, and a grand old white farm-house just beyond, with a well-sweep and an old oaken bucket that's quite worth singing about. Thence the salt-marsh runs down to the blue waters of the Salt Pond, which on the far side touch the yellow beach with its tiny scattered houses, and the whole picture is painted against the background of the sea itself, with dim Block Island looming vaguely through the morning haze.

In perfect contentment sat I there a full half-hour, filling my lungs with the wine-like air that breathed over a shining world that looked as if it had just had a bath. For a time I hadn't a thought. I was just as restfully in-

sensible as the battered old haystack in the immediate foreground. Then the beauty of those greens and yellows of the bitterweed and the buttercups began to reach me. Their loveliness is surpassing at any time. They are contrasts that blend, and there's nothing more full of beauty—or poetry either—than such a combination.

A perfectly lovely cow gradually ate her way from the other side of the field over in my direction. She was yellow, too. Wasn't it obliging of her? She didn't pay much attention to me until she got within a few feet of the wall. Then she interrupted her breakfast, came close up in front of me and almost put her head in my lap. I wasn't a bit afraid. She was so gentle, and she hadn't any horns either. Brother Jimmie says they grow them that way, though why they should I can't see. A hornless cow is like a handleless dipper or a tailless monkey. Her eyes were the loveliest purple you ever saw, and you could see your face reflected in them dimly, much as in the bottom of a deep old well under the shadow of an elm tree. And her breath! Positively it was the sweetest odor ever wafted to my snub-nose. You never smelled a cow's breath, did you, Alene? Poor thing! Well, it's extract of wild

roses and daisies and buttercups and thistles and clover and corn-tassels and sunshine and dew. When once it has touched your blessed nostrils they will never forget it, but will long for it incessantly when you are far from the dew and the clover and the corn-tassels and the wild roses.

After I had fondled her nose awhile and stroked her velvety ears, she strolled away, eating as she went, so as to make some more of that delicious breath, of course. But she never ate the bitterweed or the buttercups, nosing, instead, between them for the blades of grass underneath. Thus she spared my wondrous green and gold, and I sat and drew it all into my heart until I was afraid there wouldn't be any left for the next time.

My friend the cow meantime strolled gastronomically across the wondrous carpet and partly disappeared beyond the haystack. She stopped rather suddenly, as if surprised, but in a moment advanced another step or so, until her head and shoulders were hidden. In this position she remained so long that I began to think she was only a painted cow after all. In fact, the whole scene impressed me most indescribably as being a picture—the most marvellous of pictures, of course, but still a picture.

There wasn't a movement anywhere on the canvas. I couldn't even hear the surf. Even the thin blue film of smoke from the distant farm-house chimney hung absolutely motionless in the air. The only sound that reached my ear was the hum of an occasional vagrant bee.

At last I was moved to dispel this illusion. That fatal curiosity! The murder of the beautiful is so often to be laid at its doors. Isn't it time we learned that illusions are the most beautiful things in life, anyhow. There is scarcely one of us who does not remember how bitter it was to learn that there really isn't any Santa Claus, and how we hated the wretch who told us the miserable truth. Life would be a thing of bliss untold if we could only people the years with Santa Clauses innumerable. Reggie would say, with his talent for logic, that the real offender was the person who first persuaded me to a belief in Santa Claus, knowing that disillusion must inevitably come, but I say 'tis better to have had and lost my Santa Claus than never to have had him at all. But I rave.

Across the field, through the bitterweed and the buttercups, I tripped, in curious pursuit of my yellow cow. I rounded the haystack so as to come face to face with that gentle beastie,

and there, if you please! upon the ground, with his back to the stack, sat Mr. John Kenton, his pipe in his mouth, his abandoned sketch-book at his side, feeding *green* apples (you see how consistent is my color scheme) to the *yellow* cow. At first he didn't observe me, for I had made a gentle entrance so as not to startle the quadruped of the ambrosial breath, and though I stood transfixed for an instant, I recovered myself with commendable promptness and began noiselessly to retreat. Why? I don't know, but I did. I should have got clean away if it hadn't been for the cow. That gentle friend of earlier moments, upon observing me, promptly dropped an apple she had just taken from her benefactor's hand, slowly raised her placid head, and stared inquiringly across at me.

"Got enough, old girl?" says he. "Well, very likely you know best. What the mischief are you staring at?" With that he follows with his eyes the direction of the bovine gaze and I am discovered!

Of course we both broke out laughing—it was so utterly absurd. (I do like Mr. Kenton's laugh. It's so quiet and yet so deep. You feel that you only see the surface of a well of mirth. Reggie roars.) Mr. Kenton scram-

bled to his feet with such haste that the yellow cow backed apprehensively away, and then we both laughed some more. I may have blushed, too. I don't say I didn't.

"Did you ever smell a cow's breath?" said he, when he had stopped laughing.

Not at all what you'd have expected him to say, was it? You can always expect Mr. Kenton to say what you're not expecting him to say. I assured him that I had had that pleasure a quarter of an hour before.

"Not Minerva?" said he, indicating my yellow friend. I admitted that it was the same. Then I asked him why he called her Minerva.

"Goddess of contentment," said he.

"Wisdom," said I.

"Same thing," said he. "Good old Minerva's been a friend to me for years. I knew her mother, and when she was able to leave home I bought her. She grew up, so to speak, under my eye and instruction, and since she's reached the years of discretion she's taken to rewarding me for the care I expended upon her infant years."

"She's really yours?" I cried.

"Really mine," he went on, with a curious smile. I think he was afraid I would laugh at him.

"Of course, a cruel fate separates me from her a good part of the time. For example, I had to be in Paris a few months this spring——"

"Ahem!" said I.

"But," he went on, "Perkins looks after her. You don't know Perkins." I admitted it.

"Well, Perkins is a trusty old barnacle—a horny-handed son of toil who lives in yonder villa, where, I take it, breakfast is long since over." He indicated the farm-house across the field. "Perkins cares for Minerva and gives her board and lodging in return for about twenty quarts of milk a day, but she's mine, all the same, is Minerva—and whenever I'm within hail and feeling rather down on my luck and 'what's-the-use-ish,' you know, I just stroll over and make a call, and she—she teaches me things."

"Such as—what?" from me.

"Well," said he, "her name is Minerva, you know." I believe I asked if he were an apt pupil. He looked at me curiously, and then turned away to gather a handful of the buttercups.

"I used to be," said he; "but I seem to have lost my facility since—since I went to Paris."

Well, I had to stop that sort of thing, you

know, so I took the buttercups he had gathered, and, selecting a few for a little boutonnière, I was so foolish as to put them in his buttonhole. As he seemed about to be—well—absurdly grateful, I remarked:

"Speaking of breakfast—what is the hour?"

Heavens! It was half-past eight.

"We shall be late," I cried, turning to go. Now observe how thoughtful he is. Wasn't it dear of him—and so plausible, too. I do like to have my conscience handled tenderly. He might have said bluntly, "Perhaps we'd better not go back together—we might be misunderstood," or something equally club-footed. But not he! He lifted his hat and bowed to the ground, remarking, with an unimpeachable accent of sincerity:

"I should be delighted to accompany you, but I have to go and—er—interview Perkins about Minerva. So sorry." I did so fear he would say the wrong thing (though I never knew him to), and I was so relieved and delighted that it was all I could do to keep from saying, "Oh! you dear man!"

Be reassured, however, my patient Alene. I *did* restrain my wayward tongue. He walked with me as far as the stone wall, Minerva following anxiously behind us with her nose in his

pocket. At the wall he gave me a hand to the other side.

"Morning," said he, with his brilliant smile.

"Regards to Perkins," said I, and we parted, Minerva following at his heels through the bitterweed and the buttercups. Yes—I looked back—once.

But cheer up, the worst is yet to come (*frère* James to the fore again). When I got back to the house mamma was patrolling the beat—that is to say, the veranda. I would gladly have slipped in by a side door, but she saw me as I recrossed the rustic bridge. There isn't the least doubt that she had her field-glasses out.

"Every morn I bring thee buttercups," I sang, extending my nosegay in her direction. She took it, though it would have poisoned her had she known whose hands they were that gathered the yellow blossoms.

"I've been waiting my breakfast for you," she remarked, severely. "Where on earth have you been at this hour in the morning? Your shoes are all soaked with dew, too!"

"Dearest of all the mothers that ever I had," replied your Cynthia, "as I lay in my snowy bed at the hour of four bells, it suddenly occurred to me that I had an important appoint-

ment to go out and sit on a stone wall. So up I got, and down I came, and out I went, and there I sat, and here I am."

"With whom was your appointment, may I ask?" was the maternal inquiry.

"With myself, of course," said I.

"Oh!" said mamma.

My regret is deep and sincere that I did not add the information that I happened to meet Mr. Kenton. But how could I tell?

When I came into the breakfast-room, Reggie was missing. On inquiry, I learned that he had been called away on some business or other, but would return before dinner. I expressed, I hope, a becoming regret. I think I also commented unfavorably upon Mr. Kenton's slothful habits.

"Mr. Kenton, it seems," said your Cynthia's mamma, icily, "has also gone out somewhere." That "also" got on my nerves.

"Didn't he go with Reggie?" inquired Miss Caroline.

"He did not," replied mamma. I think she looked at me, but I don't know, for I was busy with my coffee. "It seems he had told Reggie to let him know when he went to town, as he wished him to do an errand for him. So Reggie rapped at his door when he came down,

and, getting no response, entered the room, and found it empty."

Enter at this moment the wanderer, immaculate, debonair, instinct with the freshness of the morning.

"A thousand apologies, my dear Miss Caroline," he remarked as he took his seat. "But if you will have such gorgeous mornings here you must take the consequences."

"What beautiful buttercups!" said mamma, in a Gorgonian voice. I stole one stealthy glance, and there were those miserable blossoms flaunting from his button-hole!

"Aren't they, though?" smiled Mr. Kenton, severely. "They're buttered gold, touched with dew." Conversation languished.

"I'll have another egg, please," said I.

You'd have thought this was enough for one day (I don't mean the egg), wouldn't you, dear? But nothing of the kind. My little gods were in a most spiteful mood.

After breakfast I avoided mamma for the first time in my life. Miss Caroline was driving to the village to do some shopping, and I got her to take me. On the way back we made a call or two, and that carried me through to luncheon. I believe Polly Cheatham dragged Mr. Kenton off to golf all morning. Luncheon

was not a festive occasion. Mamma was an iceberg, and poor Miss Caroline felt the chill without knowing whence it came nor why. If it hadn't been for Mr. Kenton things would have been pretty stupid. Mrs. Denton-Gibbs had been reading up and was primed with somebody else's ideas on the subject of woman's mission. Don't you hate a woman with a mission? Well, I do, anyhow, and Mr. Kenton made such polite and subtle fun of the whole business that even mamma's ice occasionally thawed into a smile. But I imagine we were all glad when the meal was over and we could escape from each other till dinner. I was, at all events.

But the final catastrophe is reserved, as all well-regulated catastrophes should be, for the last act. After luncheon I got Miss Caroline to let me take Rex and the dog-cart and went for a drive along the old post road. It's the old King's Highway between New York and Boston that was used in revolutionary times and before, and really is most picturesque, winding as it does along the foot of the first range of hills inside the sea and between them and the salt meadows that give the country hereabouts so much of its charm. And, best of all, it never loses sight of the sea.

Well, Rex must have taken me all of eighteen or twenty miles, and I was getting back into home country again when a black bank of clouds that had been threatening in the northwest began to sweep down over the hills. I called to Rex, and we began to make good time for home, but the storm overtook us a mile from the house, and it began to rain cats and dogs and bayonets, with every now and then a savage jab of lightning and a really terrifying roar of thunder. Rex was dashing along like mad, and we weren't more than half a mile from home when, under a big tree by the road not half a block away, I saw the figure of a man. Rex was demanding a good deal of attention, but I glanced again as I came opposite the tree, and who should turn a wet and smiling face upon me but Mr. Kenton.

Of course I pulled up and he hopped in, and in six minutes more we rolled up under the *porte-cochère.* We were both pretty well ruffled and drenched and generally disreputable in appearance, but as gay as a couple of larks on a spring morning.

The whole household came out on the veranda to greet us, including Reggie, who had returned from town earlier than he had expected, and there wasn't much gayety about *him.* Nor

about mamma either. Not until I saw mamma's face and the look she gave Mr. Kenton did I realize the light in which she viewed us.

Of course we were voluble with explanations, and of course we told the truth. We couldn't have thought of anything more harmless than the truth if we had tried, which we didn't, but— And in that *but* is a world of significance.

I am perfectly certain, my dear Alene, that not all the evidence in the world, presented by the Father of His Country himself, would persuade mamma that I did not go out this morning of set purpose to meet Mr. Kenton. Nor, I am sure, would she take the least stock in the theory that Mr. Kenton went out for a walk, and, being caught in the shower, was providentially overtaken and brought home by me.

Consequently, when she said to me, as we went out from dinner,

"Cynthia, I am deeply displeased with you," I merely replied:

"I'm sorry, mamma, but you're quite wrong." Then, thank Heaven, Miss Caroline came up.

I am, dear Alene,

Your perturbed

CYNTHIA.

P.S.—I wouldn't hang a cat on circumstantial evidence.

V

THANK you, my dear old chap, for the kind inquiries I know you would make if you had an opportunity. In response to them I will say that I am in as good spirits as could be expected under the circumstances. The circumstances, I may add, are not so bad.

It would, of course, give me vast pleasure to report the rest of the household in as excellent a mood as my own. But, as conscientiousness is the keynote of my nature (having inherited the same from the line of Puritan ancestors from whom I have descended very far), I am unable to do so. Nobody appears to be very gay but me. And the funny thing is that the more their spirits sink the more mine rise. I recall with zest the "see-saws" of my youth, and I am reminded that it's a fine thing to be lifted aloft—the further the better, if your end of the plank doesn't come down too rapidly.

But Reggie is cross and throws his toys around, and Mrs. Fenwick diffuses an arctic chill. Polly Cheatham thinks something is do-

ing that she ought to know but doesn't, so that accounts for her. Miss Caroline wears the expression of a firebug who has touched a match to his fuse and is wondering whether it will go out. The lady with the hyphenated caption has domestic troubles of her own—troubles which I hope Mrs. Fenwick will some day be able to sympathize with. As for Cynthia, she's blessedly troubled, too. That's very plain, though what conclusion it points to I am unable to say.

Destiny took a hand in yesterday's doings. Before breakfast I strolled over to see Minerva, who wishes to be remembered most cordially to you. Through force of habit I took along a sketch-book, and, thoroughly approving of the light it appeared to please Providence to shed on the Perkins' mansion (of course you remember Perkins of the three-ply whiskers), I sat down with my back against a haystack to take it in. Soon comes Minerva, seeking what she may devour, followed presently by Cynthia, seeking I know not what, but evidently vastly staggered by what she found—divinely staggered, too. I wish you could have seen her! Of course, I don't. That's merely a figure of speech. I was content that there should be no witnesses. There she stood, in her short walk-

ing-skirt, a white shirt-waist, with sleeves rolled up above her elbows, displaying to my blessed gaze her never-to-be-forgotten arms. Cynthia's arms! I have written a sonnet on the subject. Yes, I have, by gad! But, dry your tears, dear boy. You shall never see it.

Cynthia wore no hat!

Do you know what that means? Sit up there in your lazy chair by the panelled window, you old hippopotamus, throw away your cigarette, and try to realize the significance of what I say. Concentrate your intellect, for once, upon something worth while.

I repeat it—Cynthia wore no hat!

And—and—oh! well—sit back in your lazy chair and take up your cigarette again. English is a feeble language, after all. I might try it in French, but I couldn't write any that you would understand. Morning sunshine—gold-bronze hair—what are they but parts of speech? But if you could have seen them together!

Of course we went back separately—that is to say, I had to call on Perkins, who asked after that "painter feller that capsized ther Swaller," and was gladdened by the intelligence that you were sitting up a few minutes every day now.

In the afternoon I strolled up to Canton to see the trout hatcheries. It's an eight-mile walk there and back, and a shower overtook and treed me before I got home.

Fate again!

I hadn't been under that tree more than five minutes, and I was already coming to the conclusion that it was a wet rain, when a dog-cart came tearing up the road, on one wheel most of the way. Cynthia again! Wet—exhilarating—electric—radiant Cynthia—all by herself—not even a groom.

She rescued me—bedraggled though I was—and I give you my word that we hadn't gone two hundred yards when a streak of real sassy lightning lit on that identical tree and shivered it into jackstraws. To quote Mark Twain, it looked as if it had been something valuable and a Congressman had been there.

Cynthia was driving, and at the flash and the roar, which came together, Rex (a coal-black beast of a gee-gee) gave a realistic imitation of a Wild West Show bucker with an acute attack of the D. T.'s. Could you blame him?

Cynthia never even blinked, and in a second or two had the beast in hand again. But she didn't dare look back. I did, though. That tree

as sprinkled all over the road! I don't mind ıying that it gave me a turn.

"What did it hit?" she cried through the roar : the gale and the rain, which was howling ver us like ten thousand devils. I couldn't see ıe use of the truth at that moment, so I ıouted back:

"Can't see that it hit anything."

"Thought I heard something crash," she ied. I megaphoned back that it was prob- ›ly just the noise of the thunder, and in an- her minute we dashed in at the gate at the ›ot of the hill. As we did so, she looked at me rough lashes that sparkled with the rain, and ıid:

"Thank you for not taking the reins."

"Heavens!" said I. "I know when I'm well f!" Which was no flattery. She drives like Fatty" Carter, the Horse Show King.

Upon the subject of our reception—particu- rly at the hands of Mrs. Fenwick—I am ımb. Its only redeeming feature was its evity.

Whatever the gods of the future may have . store for Reggie Langham and me, I will ıy this for him—he's not vindictive. At din- ɜr that night he inquired if there was any ıhin' hereabouts. I assured him there was.

Ordinarily, old chap, I should have replied that there was not an edible fish in the country outside the hatcheries. And that would have been pretty nearly the truth. But I was unreasonably anxious to propitiate him. Moreover, it was a gloomy dinner.

You remember that old meadow just west of Horton's house. Well, since you were here Horton's been doing things with it. It seems he suddenly discovered that the years that he'd lived without a fresh-water pond in his dooryard constituted a barren and misspent youth. Wherefore he built a stone dam at the lower end of the two-cent brook that runs through the meadow, and the pond materialized. It's quite a lake now—all real water—and in the southeast corner is a natural island built by Horton. It's about 10 × 12, finished in maple, copper-riveted, and warranted not to shrink, swell, or warp. The most critical carpenter would have to own up that it is a real nobby island. It looks as if it had been towed there and anchored. You wonder, as you look at it, how the devil Horton concealed the cable so cleverly.

But Horton's genius was not exhausted with the island. At the upper end of the merchandise he's built a spring-house, and over this

he's put a sign of yellow letters against a red background, which reads:

"LAKE HORTON."

Also on top of the dam is a nice cast-iron fountain, with bright blue dolphins perched coyly on its rim. As you observe, it's all most artistic. If the late Frederick Law Olmsted were only alive he could get a lot of pointers from Horton. Well, into this lake Horton put a lot of yearling trout about three years ago, allowing that he'd have some fish that were fish. But if boys will be boys, trout will be trout. You can put trout in a pond, but you can't make them stay there. They didn't take kindly to Horton's hospitality. I've never known a trout that would leave home and mother to dwell in a still, calm pond without any shade or current. So, though Horton fished and swore without ceasing, never a trout did he catch. Not even the beauties of the island and the cast iron restrained them. They had all vanished. The question was, whither?

I gave a good deal of thought to that problem a year ago last spring, but I made no progress until one day our old friend Perkins happened to mention having caught trout in his pound in the Salt Pond. The next morning I

went fishing in Cold Brook. Cold Brook, you remember, runs out of the mill-pond and under the road at Browning's Mills and empties into the Salt Pond. It isn't four hundred yards long all told, but it's cold water, for the mill-pond is fed by springs, and has enough fall to give it good speed.

Browning's Mills has long held the opinion that the only fish in Cold Brook is the sucker, and that anybody who fishes there for anything else is another. Henry Clay Hoxsie drove his Democrat along as I was putting my rod together about daybreak.

"Fishin' fer suckers?" says he.

"Yep!" says I.

"Won't bite," says he.

"Well, might get a trout," says I.

"G'long," says Henry Clay, "ain't ben a traout in Col' Brook 'n forty year. Traout! Gosh! Git app!"

Well, I got eleven pounds of trout out of Cold Brook in three-quarters of an hour—two of them weighed over two pounds, and none of them less than half a pound. Browning's Mills began to wake up about then, and I sneaked home with my booty 'cross country. Why should I publish my discovery to Browning's

Mills? What had Browning's Mills ever done for me?

Well, as I say, in a moment of temporary aberration, I told Reggie something of what I have set down here for your enlightenment and invited him to go and try Cold Brook in the morning.

I might as well say right here that, whatever Reggie is or is not, he's a good and an enthusiastic fisherman. He's something of an ass and very much in my way, but he can fish. You may remember that I am a little bit swelled up about my own skill in the same line of endeavor.

Well, I gave Reggie the top of the stream, and I went to the bottom and worked up. I had fair luck from the start—the stream is pretty open, so that you can play them freely—and by the time Reggie came in sight I suppose I had seven or eight pounds in my creel (it's only a little stream, you know). Reggie, it seems, had not done so well, and had lost one good one under an old willow root. He was therefore disposed to look on my success with a liverish eye.

"Bully boy!" says he when I show him my catch; but it sounded like the cheers the Har-

vard crew give for Yale after the Elis have licked 'em again.

Well, Reggie backed up-stream a few yards and threw into a deep hole by a mossy old bowlder. I retired down-stream a bit and made a cast below a big willow-tree, where there's a little whirlpool. We both got a strike practically at the same instant.

"Hi!" shouted Reggie.

"Ha!" cried I.

My fish started up-stream as if propelled by twin screws. Reggie's started down-stream as if I had sent for him. A collision was imminent.

"Hi, there!" roared Reggie. "Reel in, will you? You'll foul my line." I didn't like his tone.

"Can't afford to lose him," I answered, calmly. And I let him run. Just then both fish leaped out of the water, took a little circle, and darted toward each other again. Mine was a beauty, and Reggie's was even larger.

The next instant the lines crossed, the fish swung round, and there we were tied up fast.

"Cut! Cut!" screamed Reggie. "Cut, or I'll lose him."

"Haven't you got a knife?" said I, with fine irony.

At that instant the tension on Reggie's line relaxed. He had lost his fish.

"It's all your fault," he said, angrily, as he reeled in. "You should have nursed him down-stream."

"Wasn't I fishing up-stream?" I inquired, sweetly.

"And wasn't I fishing down-stream?" he retorted. At that I landed my fish. He weighed two pounds and a half easily. That didn't pour any oil on the waters, either. Reggie glared at the trout a moment.

"Mine was bigger," he growled.

"Yes," I answered, philosophically, "that's always the case with the fish that get away."

We came home by different ways.

I think I mentioned that Reggie was not vindictive. What follows is by way of proving it. I thought the trout affair had alienated his affections from me for life; but no such luck, dear chap, no such luck. Though when last I had seen him he wore a frown a foot thick, he appeared at the breakfast-table sunny, affable, simply oozing most flattering regard for me and my opinions. Indeed, instead of earning his ill-will over those blessed fish, it appeared that I had made him a friend for life—a friend, indeed, who would never desert me, however much I might desire him to.

Promptly after breakfast my new-found ad-

mirer insisted on going to see the horses (it having begun, in the meantime, to drizzle). So out we went to the stables. You know I keep Gunfire down in the country the year round. Perkins looks after her when I'm away, and when I'm here I have her brought over to Miss Caroline's. Well, we looked over the carriage horses, the two hackneys—the pair of roadsters that Miss Caroline's brother drives—Miss Caroline's own cob, and the general utility chestnut. I had the groom take 'em all out and turn 'em around for him. He was cheerfully critical of them all. It's a pretty fair stable—full of ponies. (You know what a horseman Miss Caroline's brother is.) But they didn't suit Reggie in the least. Of course they are not faultless, but it was edifying to see Reggie miss the weak points.

He'd stand with his feet wide apart, his hands in his pockets, his chest thrown out, and his head one side, and remark judicially:

"Hum! Haw!"

Then he'd look at the teeth and pick up a forefoot or so, and then:

"Hum! Haw! That one with the blaze is a bit lackin' in substance." (The fact being that the one with the blaze has more substance than any horse of his inches in the stable.)

Last of all the groom led out Gunfire. Reggie didn't know I had a horse there, and I didn't tell him—didn't say a word. Just had the man lead her out and let her stand. Jove! She was a picture!

Now, you knew all about Gunfire. But, to refresh your memory, let me state that she's by Meddler, out of Maxim, that she won the Eclipse Stakes as a two-year-old, did not race as a three-year-old on account of the death of Harley Tompkins, who owned her, that she won the Metropolitan Handicap as a four-year-old with 129 pounds on her back, ran second in the Brooklyn, and, as the result of a bad ride, was beaten only a nose in the Suburban by Buccaneer. After that she wrenched a pastern, and wouldn't stand training, though she never has made a complaint since she came into my possession as a legacy from Uncle Dan, who bought her for his breeding farm at Lexington, where she foaled three colts and one filly, every one of which has turned out a high-class racer. She's thirteen years old, as beautiful and as full of spirit as in her racing days, does not show a scar, and never makes a moan. I haven't a doubt that any breeder in Kentucky would give me $15,000 for her to-day if I wanted to sell her. Now, mark our expert

He ran his hand carelessly over her withers.

"Hum! Haw!" said he. "Handy little beast. Don't like the way she stands. 'S that near eye of hers all right?"

"No," said I. "She's stone blind."

The groom put one hand over his mouth and got purple in the face.

"Too bad," said Reggie. "Been blind long?"

"Foaled that way," I told him. He picked up her off forefoot. "Pretty well spread," he grumbled.

"Yes," I sighed; "might have been a useful mare if she'd been used right."

"Spavined, I see," he went on. The groom began to choke. "Wind all right?"

"No," said I, regretfully; "badly foundered. Whistles like a mocking-bird."

"Who's she belong to?" he demanded.

"Me."

"What the devil do you keep her for?"

"Sentimental reasons," said I, oracularly.

"Sentiment's all rot when it comes to horses," growled Reggie.

"She was a gift," I apologized.

"Man must have enough brass to give away a junk heap like that," laughed Reggie. "'F I was you, think I'd feel justified in lookin' that gift horse in the mouth."

By this time the groom's mirth was beginning to sour, and I confess that my own patience was showing signs of wear. But I was sure of my revenge, so I merely told the man to take the mare away, and we went into the house.

Reggie stuck close at my elbow till we passed the library door. Cynthia was there writing letters, and Reggie, seeing her, abandoned me, and went in and threw himself into a chair. Miss Caroline came out of the drawing-room just then, and we stood talking by the library door. Reggie broke out as soon as he was seated:

"Just been out lookin' the horses over." I gave Miss Caroline a gentle wink.

"Yes?" said Cynthia, politely, her pen going right on scratching.

"Kenton showed me that old broken-down plug of his." The scratching stopped, and said Cynthia:

"You don't mean Gunfire?"

"B'lieve that's the name," replied her *fiancé*.

"Gunfire was bequeathed to Mr. Kenton by his uncle, Mr. Daniel Clay," said Cynthia.

"Well, Mr. Daniel Clay ought to have been ashamed of himself." Cynthia laughed. Miss Caroline beamed. I hugged myself.

"Do you think so?" gurgled Cynthia. "Gunfire cost Mr. Clay just $18,000."

There was a holy silence inside the library. Miss Caroline and I stole away lest it should be profaned.

Such a forgiving disposition! A more amiable manner than Reggie's at luncheon I never have suffered. Cynthia declined to meet my eye once during the meal, and if I detected her biting her lip upon three separate occasions, I make bold to say it was not a sign of annoyance. Reggie, the leech, stuck to me after luncheon even closer than before. We must needs play billiards, it seemed. It was still drizzling outside, and, as the ladies all appeared to be in a retiring mood, there was nothing for it but billiards. So we billiarded and smoked most of the afternoon. Cynthia came in and watched the game a few minutes, but she was in a quietly suggestive mood, and while she stayed Reggie himself seemed a bit subdued. Unfortunately, she didn't stay long.

To make short work of a devilishly long day, I put in most of the time in Reggie's society. Imagine, if you can, what that means—and Cynthia beneath the same roof! My only consolation is that when Reggie is with me I am

reasonably sure that he's not with Cynthia. Poor Reggie! He's so transparent! He's plenty of reasons for holding me in much aversion, and Heaven knows I don't care if he never comes back. Yet here we are—the two inseparables — going about like Damon and Pythias, apparently indivisible. It is most affecting to look at, but neither of us dares let go.

Progress? No. I haven't any to record—at least precious little. I've had only one interview with Cynthia to-day. It was while we were coming out from dinner, Reggie being blocked off by Miss Caroline. This was it:

Cynthia: "Reggie tells me you've been showing Gunfire to him."

Ego: "I had that pleasure."

Cynthia: "Reggie's quite a horseman, isn't he?"

Ego: "I have seen worse."

Cynthia: "Do you happen to remember where?"

Reggie (bustling up): "Oh! I say, Kenton, old chap, do come and sing us that bully thing about 'Comin' down from Bangor.'"

Gad! What an imbecile I am! If I had the intelligence of a pink-eyed rabbit I'd have seen it before. It has just occurred to my barren

brain. Hereafter I shall leave them alone together as much as possible. If anything can ruin Reggie, that will do it certain sure. A lifetime of Reggie! Mustn't that thought occur to Cynthia, if I do but give it a chance?

The rain still drizzles dismally through the leaves of the elms. My window-panes are streaked with clotted moisture. Heaven send fair skies to-morrow, that I may go afield while Reggie rushes on his fate.

Think, old boy—but for Cynthia's driving along in the dog-cart just as she did, I shouldn't have been writing to you to-night. I —I shouldn't have been doing much of anything, I daresay. Odd that it should have been anybody, but stranger still that it should have been Cynthia. Ninety seconds—not more—drawing it pretty fine, wasn't it? I wonder if it will make any difference.

J. K.

VI

CONGRATULATE me, du lieber Ralph. Glow with sympathetic enthusiasm on my account. Throw up your best hat and lead the cheering. Let your accents of frenzied joy rise loud and clear above the roar of Paris, that city where everyone is gay and few are happy. Sound the loud timbrel (which I take to be Old Testament for "let the band play"), request the minstrels to smite the harp and otherwise indicate glee, for these arms of mine—these joy-predestined arms—have held Cynthia.

This very day it happened—the 28th of June—I have set a red mark about it. It outranks the Fourth of July, and takes precedence of the day when the Prince kissed the sleeping Princess and dispelled the fell enchantment. Think of it! All through these thirty years and more have I been marching toward this day and didn't know it. Imagine the times I have passed the 28th of June without so much as a friendly nod. What a forgiving day to so return good for evil! What a pity I could not have foreseen this Heaven-sent 28th of June.

How it would have sustained me in the hours of trial and tribulation, "when friends despair and hopes deceive," could I only have been able to say to myself, "never mind, buck up, old man, the 28th of June will come!" Did I understand you to say "ring off"?

Know, then, that I have influence with Miss Caroline's cook. How I acquired it I do not feel called upon to state. Bribery?—not at all—simply the perquisite of my engaging personality. Wherefore, though the glorious orb of day had not quite risen upon a sleeping world when I descended to the kitchen this morning, I did not receive a negative in response to my prayer for coffee and things. There was not enough light to make a really good negative, anyhow. Having upholstered my interior, I proceeded stable-ward and found the faithful Watkins just completing his task of grooming Gunfire. I sat down to wait while she had her breakfast. Watkins began on the hackneys, and I put in the time watching him.

"Watkins," said I, after a while, "it's a great thing to be a good judge of a horse."

"It is that, sir," admitted Watkins; "there's mighty few that is."

"True for you," I replied; "but once in a dog's age we come across one. Now there's

Mr. Langham." Watkins suspended operations.

"Was that 'im as was lookin' at the mare?" he demanded. I nodded solemnly.

"Wonderful judge of horse-flesh," said I. "Can't fool him."

"Yah!" from Watkins.

"I didn't catch what you said, Watkins?"

"The bloomin' flies won't leave a 'orse quiet, sir," said Watkins.

So Gunfire and I went roving, and I will do the denizens of the countryside the justice to say that every man Jack, maid, wife, widow, and divorcée that we passed turned to watch us out of sight. No, I don't take much of the credit to myself, though I will state that I have seen worse riders. It doesn't matter where our early hours were spent, but Phœbus hadn't been driving his chariot our way more than an hour when we arrived at Four Corners.

"Gunfire, old lady," said I, politely, "whither shall we wend?"

"Perfectly imperial to me," she replied.

"But," I insisted, "you know that we can take the Voluntown pike, which will lead us to the dwelling of Sally Hazard, 'queen of the Yarbs,' or, on the other hand, the highway which runs past the modest dwelling of Cap'n Holly, who

will, with slight encouragement, delight us with the tale of the Wandering Whistling Buoy or the yarn of the Roosian Poodle, or, mayhap, some other classic of the salt and briny sea."

Gunfire tossed her head impatiently and started off to the right. So I let her go. Halfway down the hill we met a Red Devil or a Pink Pest—one of that breed, anyhow. I don't believe the mare had ever seen one in operation before. Anyhow, she took the four-rail fence without asking permission, and I can't say I blame her. I've owned one of the things myself, but I'm as ashamed of it as you are. I can't dispute the fascination of the automobile, but I do say that it's the most demoralizing and selfish sport in the world. The automobilist doesn't have to dodge or look sharp or handcuff his horse or smell the gasoline. It's the poor public that has to do that. He has all the fun, and the public does the swearing. I'm willing to admit that on the ground an automobilist may possibly be a gentleman, but, once in his machine with his hand on the lever, he's an enemy of the people, to be generally classed with smallpox. The particular Green Griffin that I met this morning is a case in point. The road was straight and narrow. The driver saw that my mount was frantic with fear, yet

on he came, never slackening his speed in the least, driving straight at me, with his old junk-heap roaring and rattling like a boiler-shop on a drunk. So we took the fence!

Maybe you think I'm wandering from the point. Not at all. Content yourself with the reflection that I'm getting nearer to it all the time. It's my story, and I'm going to tell it in my own sweet way. A good thing is always worth waiting for. Besides (and I intend to copyright it), the pleasures of anticipation always heighten those of realization. Out upon the man who, on sitting down to a dainty feast, calls at once for the *chef d'œuvre* of the meal and devours it at one fell gulp. The beautiful things of life are to be approached with delicacy. Let the intelligence perceive before the eye sees. Let the eye see before the hand lays hold, and when the hand lays hold let it be with a touch so gentle that it is a caress and not a grasp. So shall the beauty and divinity of life become an essence—a mantle—an atmosphere—a spirit—that enfolds and wraps you tenderly close, rather than a reluctant sprite to be seized and conquered and manacled before it slips away. Now will you behave yourself?

We found Cap'n Holly coiled up in a broken-down surf-boat, which he had rescued from the

breakers and was engaged in repairing. Cap'n Holly's neighbors haven't much respect for Cap'n Holly, and, therefore, I have the less respect for them. They give as a reason for this attitude toward the ancient mariner the fact that he is a liar, and a notorious one at that. Now it seems to me that the more notorious the liar the less dangerous.

There's an awful lot of rot talked about this lying, anyhow. When a man says to me, drawing himself up to his full height and lowering his voice to the pitch of solemnity: "Sir, I never lie!" I make up my mind that that man is either a humbug or an infernal nuisance. And whichever he is I'll have none of him in mine. The man who won't tell a lie that harms nothing but his own cross-eyed conscience, in order to save a heartache or a tear, ought to be told the truth about himself—and that's a penalty I hope never to incur. "The Lord loveth a cheerful liar," is not, I am aware, Biblical, but I believe it all the same. A man can't tell a bad lie cheerfully. This categorical distinction between a lie and the truth is all nonsense, anyhow. It's just as foolish to say that a lie is always evil and the truth always good, as to say that a horse is always sound or a dog always fat. There are sound horses and

unsound horses, fat dogs and lean dogs, bad lies and good lies.

Now I've heard Cap'n Holly tell many a lie, but never a bad one. He knows he's lying and I know he's lying, and he knows that I know he's lying. It's all understood, and I don't think any the less of him for lying, nor he of me for not calling him a liar. So there you are.

When Cap'n Holly and I meet there are always certain preliminaries. He informs me that his rheumatism is "gripin' him some t'-day," and I ask after his dog. Then we discuss the direction and velocity of the wind, after which we get down to fiction. Consider, then, these preliminaries over and done with, and list to the tale that was told to me by an ancient and battered son of the sea!

"Yes, we don't never git no win' roun' these parts fit t' blow a candle out. I hev ben in my seagoin' days, though, whar 't blowed some, I guess. 'Bout th' liveliest breeze o' win' 't I c'n call t' min' jist naow, tickled my whiskers 'n th' spring o' '73 in th' Injun Ocean.

"'Twas when I was mate o' the whalin' schooner Lizy Bess. We'd ben aout from Noo London 'bout a year I guess, an' hed ketched a right smart lot o' blubber, too. Wall, ne'

min' 'baout the blubber. This here blow come aout o' the nor-east from a clear sky. 'Twas my watch b'low an' I was in my bunk et th' time, an' the ship rolled so 't when she went over t' starboard I pitched aout on t' the floor. B'fore I c'd git up she rolled t' port, an' blame 'f she didn't heave me right back int' my bunk. Wall, I kep' a-goin' back 'n forth like that, bein' played long tennis with, ez ye may say, till the second mate come b'low t' see why I wa'n't on deck with the rest. He ketched me by the slack o' the pants ez I was makin' one trip from the wall to the bunk an' yanked me out o' that cabin. Guess I'd a ben a grease spot on the wall purty soon 'f he hadn't.

"Wall, I went on deck t' help shorten sail, an' th' first man I see was th' ole man hisself, an' say! I like t' fainted. I knowed 't was him by the mole that growed on his nose—curiouses' mole 't ever yew see, 'twas—but 'f 't hadn't a ben fer that mole I'd a never knowed him noways. Th' ole man useter wear a set o' whiskers ez long ez a beggin' letter, but when I see him on deck I swan 'f his face wa'n't ez smooth ez yourn.

"Says I, 'Ben takin' a shave, Cap'n?'

"'No,' he hollers. 'Had 'um hauled aft an' the win' blowed 'em off. An' I'll be dadbinged

ef 't wa'n't so. I ain't never hed so much hair m'self sence that breeze o' win'."

I suggested that the sea must have been pretty rough.

"Maountains high—maountains high," said the aged romancer. "Why, the trough o' one sea wuz so deep thet there ship graounded et th' bottom uv it! No, we didn't hev to hev no tug t' pull her off. Th' next roller wus tug 'nough fer us."

"Damage the ship any?" I inquired, politely.

"Nothin' t' speak uv. Lost part uv our ketch, though. Ship rolled so 't she heaved a few barrels o' whale oil aout uv her hatches—same's you'd shake a rat aout uv a potato sack."

So Gunfire and I fared on our way, cheered by the sprightly fancy of this Chaucer of the Sea. And in due time, the same being about the middle of the forenoon, we came to that same sea and strolled up Evans's Beach, sacred to excursionists, peanuts, and carrousels, past the chutes and the Ferris wheel, and over Sandy Bluff to Farwell's Beach, where only the elect may lave themselves. I have been elected myself, occasionally, and, as it was "the hour," I encountered various foolish persons of my acquaintance going to and from the bath-houses.

Dolly French had heard that I was back from Europe and wanted to know where I had been in hiding, to which I explained that I hadn't been feeling quite myself (which was the truth, God knows!). Charley Dalrymple (who owes me a hundred and has quite forgotten it), not recognizing the mare, offered me a thousand for her. Mrs. Bobby Hatton asked me to dine with "them" on Thursday, and Karl Rogers dunned me to join the Casino.

But Gunfire and I were not to be stayed. We kept right on to the west along the margin of the sea till we came into our own country, and we found it good. The tide was falling, but there was a pretty stiff sou'wester driving in and the surf was fairly active. At the far end of the beach I made out a group of animated specks, which turned out to be natives of Browning's Mills engaged in the classic operation of "openin' of the breachway." As you know, there's no natural outlet from the Salt Pond to the sea, and in order to save the oyster crop an outlet must be made. As a sou'east blow always shuts it up again, "openin' of the breachway" is a fairly steady job for the inhabitants of Browning's Mills.

I left Gunfire tied behind an old fish-house and strolled on to supervise the job. There

were almost a dozen men doing the shovelling, and our old friend Perkins, who had been bossing the work till I got there, was directing a pair of horses and a sand-scoop. They had dug a trench about fifteen feet wide nearly to the sea, and only a narrow strip of sand held back the waters of the Salt Pond. They were waiting for the tide to fall a bit more before cutting it loose. I passed between the end of the breach and the sea, lay down on the sand and slept.

Presently I dreamed that I heard the voice of Cynthia. This was nothing extraordinary. I had dreamed it lots of times before. So I said to the dream: "You here again, old friend? Glad to see you, as always. Take off your things and stay awhile."

Something poked me gently in the ribs. I had placed my hat over my face to exclude the sun, and, glancing down beneath the rim, I saw the point of a pink parasol. I removed the hat, and my dream came true. Said Cynthia:

"Lazy man!"

Said I: "Why, how do you do?"

Cynthia had crossed over that narrow strip of land that the diggers had left, even as I had done. On the other side of the breach stood Mrs. Fenwick and Reggie.

"Hullo, Kenton!" cried the latter. "Thought you were going to ride with me to-day."

"Forgot all about it," I answered. (This was a lie that belongs to the genus harmless.) "Ten thousand apologies."

"Forgive me for having disturbed your slumber," said Cynthia. "Will you?"

"I should never have forgiven you if you hadn't," said I. As I glanced at the breachway I noticed that the detaining strip of sand was getting oozy. Another glance told me that neither Mrs. Fenwick nor Reggie had observed it.

"Lovely day," I shouted at them. "How'd you happen down here?"

"We're on our way to luncheon at the Everets'. Mamma wanted to go and I didn't, so we compromised," explained Cynthia. "I agreed to go to the Everets' if they would drive down to the beach first. Watkins is over there with the horses." I stole another glance at the breachway. Sure enough it was beginning to move. The sand was quicksand now. I saw that Mrs. Fenwick was looking apprehensively into the ditch. So I shouted across:

"Ever see this job done before?"

Cynthia's mamma looked up to reply, and that moment was what I needed. With a rush

and a swish the dammed-up waters of the Salt Pond bore through the little sand strip and carried it into the sea. The breachway was opened. Cynthia and I were on one side and Mrs. Fenwick and Reggie on the other!

The conversation that followed was profitless and not particularly pleasant to anybody but me. Bear in mind the conditions. From where Cynthia and I stood it was an eight-mile walk around the Salt Pond. The breachway was twelve or fifteen feet wide and three feet deep in water that boiled along at a good pace—manifestly impassable for a lady. Perkins had gone away with his horses and the sides of the breachway were too precipitous for a horse to manage, anyway. Pretty bad, I guess! Mrs. Fenwick scolded.

Reggie scowled and grumbled, and I outwardly deplored, and inwardly rejoiced.

Cynthia said nothing, but I hope I saw her smile once or twice. Let me think so, anyhow. After this had gone on for a while Reggie sullenly departed in search of a boat, while Mrs. Fenwick planted herself on the sand with her face resolutely fixed in our direction.

Cynthia turned her face toward the sea and murmured in my ear, but without looking at me:

"How far is the nearest boat?"

"About two miles away," said I. It was the blessed truth, too. Anyhow, it was a mile and a half. I hope I may be forgiven a half mile. I'm confident it was a mile. Well—I'll swear to a half mile.

"We shall be late for luncheon," said Cynthia. This time she did smile. I saw her little, milk-white teeth. I glanced at mamma. The sight was not encouraging. But I dared, nevertheless.

"I—I—er—I could carry you across, if you didn't mind," I ventured.

"I weigh a hundred and thirty"—eyes still on the sea.

"I repeat that I could carry you across." Then she looked at me through her sun-kissed lashes.

"Would you mind?" she said.

Would I mind! I think my look was sufficient answer. At any rate she turned, went to our edge of the breachway, through which the water was rushing at a fine rate, and cried:

"Mamma, Mr. Kenton is going to carry me across."

"What!" shouted mamma. Cynthia repeated her statement. There followed an explosive oration in which fears of death by drowning played a prominent part. Really, when it was

over, I was almost persuaded that I was about to wade a young Niagara—but not quite persuaded. As for Cynthia, she made no reply whatever. I tossed my hat on the sand.

"Let me take it," said Cynthia. So we started, in the face of mamma, so to speak.

As I lifted her adorable body, Cynthia put her arms around my neck. She must have heard my heart beat. Didn't you hear it, too, in Paris?

As I slipped into the current I could feel the warmth of her breath in my hair. It really wasn't much of a stunt—just a miserable fifteen feet or so. Would that it had been a mile! (Every one of these sentences ought to be a paragraph—yes, a book.)

Half-way across I thought she whispered something, but I was splashing so much I couldn't be sure, so I stopped.

"Heavens! He's going to fall!" screamed Mrs. Fenwick. But Cynthia whispered simply:

"Do you very much mind?"

So she came safe across—did my lady of the violet eyes—and not so much as the tips of her blessed little boots were wet.

Mrs. Fenwick engineered a prompt departure. Reggie was to be picked up on the way.

After they had gone I turned and looked

again across the breachway. A little dab of white fluttered in the breeze upon the sand. I have it yet.

Polly Cheatham and I went golfing at the Country Club in the afternoon. Remember Polly? You know how you'll wrap people up in a neat, brown-paper parcel, tied with a green string, paste a label on them, lay them up on a shelf somewhere and forget all about them. Well, I did Polly up that way a long time ago —much as three years ago, I think. She made an uncommonly neat bundle, I remember, and I was some time tying the string, which was finally, after some deliberation, done up in a bow-knot, so that a single pull at one end would undo it, in case it were wanted in a hurry. Still, I did put the Polly parcel on the shelf, and the label, if I am not mistaken, read: "Pale!"

The parcel has come off the shelf. It hasn't been untied exactly, but I find I made a slight mistake in the classification. To wit:

Polly knows something about dogs, and we talked dog all the way to the Club. She knows as much about dogs as Reggie doesn't know about horses. Eulogy is thus exhausted. Now you know that the subscriber is not an expert on the links. I was getting on splendidly—around 90 or so—when George Cody called me

a promising beginner, and volunteered to teach me his stroke. Since then the greens-keeper glares when he sees me coming.

Polly knows all about my golf, so that it did not come as a shock to her, and after the first two or three holes she directed her attack against Colonel Bogey. I was on the fifth green in about six—I don't know, I lost count—and Polly was going down in four.

"Reggie plays a right clever game of golf," said she.

"So?" said I, and overran the hole.

At the seventh tee it was Polly's honor, of course, and she led off with a clinking drive of 150 yards or so. As I was addressing the gutta-percha, she remarked:

"Reggie generally drives the green from here."

"Ah?" I said, politely, and foozled my drive.

As I was shovelling my ball out of the sand bunker on the tenth hole with my lofter, Polly observed:

"I've seen Reggie clear that bunker a hundred yards."

"Really?" I snapped, filling the landscape with sand.

As I topped my brassey just after driving fifty yards from the thirteenth tee, Polly began:

"Now Reggie——"

"Oh, forget Reggie!" I growled, my patience quite exhausted. Polly smiled a queer little smile.

"Don't you like Reggie?" she asked, wonderingly.

"Of course I do," I rejoined, "but I didn't come out to talk about him or to hear of nothing else." Polly came very close and insisted on being looked at.

"Don't you really like him?" inquired she.

"Well, then," I answered, "if you will have it, I don't. In fact, I can't think of anybody, at just this moment, whom I like less. And if you don't like what I say, why—you've brought it on yourself—that's all." Polly grinned—there's no other word for it.

"Well," she replied, "you know, I'm not crazy about him myself, and how in the world Cynthia Fenwick could——"

"Fore!" yelled an indignant voice behind us, and looking around we saw two players glaring from the tee. So we moved on.

Polly was about fourteen up (I did manage to tie one or two holes, and she lost her ball once), and we were sitting at a table on the piazza drinking something cold, when, apropos of nothing, she remarked:

"You know the firm of Buchanan and Cheatham?" I did. They are brokers.

"Well," she continued, serenely, "brother Frank is the junior partner in that firm." I looked at her, but could make nothing out of it, so I said:

"Have another?"

"They do a good deal of Reggie's business—stocks and things," said Polly. I said that it was going to be a fine sunset.

"Reggie's an awful nuisance around a house," said Polly. I asked permission to light a cigarette.

"Brother Frank will do anything to please me," said Polly. At this point I reached up on that shelf and took that parcel down.

"Will you get me some writing things?" asked Polly. I got them, and she went to work. It was not a very long letter, five or six pages, maybe, but it was written *con amore,* and with many suppressed little gurglings and smilings and moistenings of red lips, and noddings of the head, and wrigglings of the shoulders. When at last it was done Polly rose and gave me the letter, remarking:

"You might see if the address is correct." This is how it read:

"Mr. Frank P. Cheatham,
"Buchanan and Cheatham,
"48½ Broad Street,
"New York City.

"(Personal.)"

"Do you think you can remember to mail it?" said Polly. With difficulty I refrained from embracing her.

"Polly," I said, "I kiss your hand. Only the publicity of our surroundings saves you from a more embarrassing recognition of my indebtedness."

"Always my luck," said Polly, cheerfully.

I have taken the label off that parcel. Send me the proper adjective by cable. Thy

J. K.

VII

ALENE DEAR:

They are trying to close the net around your Cynthia, and, what is worse, she has begun to struggle—yes, that is by all odds the worst of it. Her struggles have not yet become frantic—not even violent. Perhaps they amount as yet to only a faint flutter of the wings and a feeble chirp or two. Yet it would be bad enough, wouldn't it, dear child, if she only regarded the snare with unmixed disfavor, instead of with the apprehensive delight that every marriageable bird ought to feel when she has allowed herself to be entangled in the net and feels its meshes tightening. For your Cynthia did allow herself to be entangled. To be sure, she did not rush into it with enthusiasm. She even needed a little parental urging, but she saw it all the same before she stepped into it—yes, she cannot say she didn't see it. And now she's in two minds whether to fly or not. Nor does she know if she could fly, if she chose—she has not tried her poor wings for so long.

Would they bear her up, do you think? Once more—if she flies, whither?

Reggie has been sedulously cultivating Mr. Kenton's society. I can't think why, because I know he loathes him, yet they've been as thick as the Siamese twins, even after Reggie discovered that Mr. Kenton had "grossly deceived" him (that is the way Reggie put it) in the matter of a horse. But this afternoon Polly Cheatham took Mr. Kenton off to golf or Mr. Kenton inveigled Polly away—I don't know which—and Reggie, relieved of his self-imposed duty, sought my society immediately after lunch.

"Been lookin' at some houses lately," he began, when his cigar was drawing well. I indicated a polite attention.

"One up in West Eleventh Street, just off the avenue, that I think would please you." I admitted that it was possible.

"Not very large—large enough," he went on. "Don't want a bloomin' ark to start with, do you?"

"Only in case of another flood," said I.

"Pshaw!" he cried (his temper is so short of late), "why can't you be serious for a moment?"

"A flood is a serious thing enough, I should think," I remonstrated, argumentatively. Reg-

gie suppressed an ejaculation. He was silent for a while. Then he inquired shortly:

"Want to run up some day pretty soon and look at it?"

"Not while this weather lasts," I replied.

"Oh! rot the weather," said he, impatiently.

"Don't ask me to rot any such lovely weather as this," said I, firmly, "for I'll not do it. Besides, there's no hurry about the house."

"Anybody'd think you didn't mean to keep your word," he growled, avoiding my glance. I said nothing. After a while he went on:

"It's not a bad sort of house—two and a half stories, brownstone of course, and a basement. Hard-wood floors all around—little conservatory off the dinin'-room, three or four bathrooms on every floor, billiard-room—library—so on."

"What's the use of telling me that a dog has four legs, Reggie?" said I. I was so amazed. I could imagine the subject handled so differently. And yet, when I come to think of it, it was exactly like Reggie. I hadn't any reason to expect him to treat it in any other way. If I had ever looked forward to imagine how he would go about it, I certainly would have foreseen that he would do it precisely as he did. But I never had looked forward, except in the

vaguest sort of way. If I had—well, never mind, I retract that "if."

Still it was rather low down of me to snap Reggie up as I did. I don't defend myself. But doesn't the fact that I could be so unreasonable about it and yet not be one bit sorry—for I'm not—speak volumes. As I think those volumes are in a language you thoroughly understand, I sha'n't translate for your benefit.

Well, poor Reggie, thus headed off, got up, put his hands in his pockets, paced up and down, frowning heavily, as if meditating some momentous speech. Then he bolted into the house, where presently I heard him playing billiards with Mr. Everson, that's Miss Caroline's brother, who came last night, from Chicago—I think—some pork place, anyhow.

I went upstairs to get my hat, and there another corner of the net confronted me. Mamma was waiting for me with something on her mind. You can always tell when mamma has something on her mind. She is volubility itself upon subjects in which you know she takes no interest whatever. I've never seen a fight between a black snake and a rattler, but I've heard somebody tell about them—Mr. Kenton, I think it was. It seems that the black snake begins to run slowly around the rattler, a safe distance

off, and gradually increases his speed and narrows the circumference of the circle around which he is revolving, with his foe as the centre. When the black snake thinks he is near enough, he comes to an instantaneous stop. The rattler's eyes have become so used to following the course of his enemy that for an instant they keep right on. That is the fatal instant when the black snake hurls himself with deadly accuracy upon his victim.

Now I'm far from comparing mamma to a black snake or myself to a rattler, but her method of attack is really much the same. She pours out a perfectly bewildering volley of gossip, opinion, and comment (and some of it's really smart, for mamma can talk well when she likes) about the most irrelevant things in the world, and suddenly at the height of the fireworks she comes to a dead stop and launches at you her thunderbolt. Now, if you don't happen to know her method, this sort of thing is very likely to bowl you over.

Poor brother Jimmie got the stage-door fever one time, when he was at the calf age, and somebody who dropped in at Terry's one night happened to see him supping with a dazzling lady, whose nightly duty it was to drink deep draughts out of empty cups on the village green

and cheer for the young squire's bride. This person (I don't say it was Reggie), being deeply alarmed for Jimmie's morals, told mamma, and at breakfast next morning (papa was away at the time) it happened. Jimmie was up to his ears (he nearly lost one of them, too) in foot-ball just then, so mamma began on foot-ball. I couldn't tell you now what she said, but it was simply killing. Poor foolish Jimmie nearly fell out of his chair—he laughed so hard. I was amused, too, but my amusement was mixed with sorrow for my fatuous brother, for well I knew that trouble was due. It came. With a single twist of the wrist mamma turned off the sky-rockets, turned on the search-light, and remarked, in an awful voice:

"James, I hear that you can give me some information about a person who bears the picturesque name of Miss Ruby Ta-ta!"

Poor Jimmie turned more colors than Joseph's coat. I didn't stay to watch his writhings. The sight was too painful for my sensitive eyes.

Well, as I was saying, when I so rudely interrupted myself, the wheels began to go round the moment I entered my room. It's useless to try to give you any conception of the way the sparks flew off the anvil. I see I'm

mixing my metaphors, so I'll stop the attempt. It's enough to say that mamma did herself credit. But I had seen her work so often (many times at my expense) that I was not to be beguiled. I knew the symptoms. So I sat down and waited for the thrust. I knew about when it was coming, too, and guarded accordingly. Presently it came. Apropos of a string of epigrams on millinery, mamma remarked:

"Cynthia, it is time you choose your wedding day!" I parried promptly.

"You are stating merely your own opinion, I suppose."

"Of course, of course." She was obviously annoyed at my readiness.

"I suppose you haven't talked it over with Reggie," I went on, innocently. "He might not agree with you."

"I happen to know," said mamma, "that he is quite of my opinion."

"Oh," said I, raising my eyebrows, "then you *have* talked it over with Reggie."

"Well," said mamma, biting her lip, "of course he mentioned it first."

"Of course," said I, with emphasis.

"Your father, too," she went on, looking out of the window, "agrees with me." I laughed.

"Poor old dad," I said. "I don't think he

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would differ much with me on such a point." He wouldn't, either (bless his dear old soul!).

"Do I understand you to say that you object?" inquired mamma, severely. I was silent. "Because, if you do, I should like to know the reason. It was understood all along that your wedding should take place in October. It is now almost July. There are many things to be done. You know what they are. I don't need to remind you of them. If you mean now that you will not be married in October, you must see the necessity of giving your reasons."

Still I said nothing. Mamma misinterpreted my silence. She thought I was weakening. In reality I was making up my mind that I would *not* be married in October, no—not if I were never married. She looked at me suspiciously and hurried on, with menace in her voice:

"If you have changed your mind it's happened since we came here, and I insist upon knowing why. If it's——"

"Mamma!" I cried, sharply. I don't know what she was going to say, but I—I was afraid it was something that would precipitate a climax—a climax for which I was not ready—for which I *am* not ready. She stopped, anyhow. Then I made a speech.

"Mamma," I said, "there are some things

that you have no right to insist on, and this is one of them. There is only one person who has a right to insist, and if he insists I'll tell him. I don't need to tell you that this match to which I was pledged (I emphasized the tense just the least bit, and it made her wince) is largely your doing. I don't dispute that you made it in the belief that you were doing the best thing for me. Of course you did. All the same, I never pretended, either to you or Reggie, to be very enthusiastic about it. You never noticed me shedding tears of delight over it. You did it all, and—from something I have learned recently (this time she did wince)—I'm inclined to think you were a little strenuous about it."

"My dear," said my poor mamma, "when you have had my experience you will learn not to misjudge your mother."

"I don't mean to, mamma," I assured her, "but I can't disguise from you or myself the fact that the nearer October draws the further off I wish it. I wish to oblige you in all reasonable ways, but the fact is I can't look with pleasure toward being married in October, and I don't mean to be." Mamma stood up. She always does when she is angry.

"Well"—she began explosively, but checked

herself. She evidently saw that it would not take much to make me desperate. Mamma was angry, but she has tact. The logical thing was for her to ask me if I really intended to marry Reggie at all. But she didn't ask. I wonder why, and, if she had, what I should have answered? However, what she did say was:

"Will you tell Reggie?" I said yes, and out she went. The door slammed, too, but maybe it was the wind. I don't say it wasn't.

You're wanting some news of Mr. Kenton by this time, aren't you, dear? I know you are. Well, I have some—some that's quite sensational, too. I've had only the merest glimpses of him for two days. Don't understand me as complaining—not in the least—it would be most improper of me, I'm sure. I'm merely stating facts. Between Reggie and Polly and his own solitary excursions his time has been pretty well accounted for. But somehow the microscopic moments that we have had together seem to have been as full of incidents as an egg is of meat—accidental incidents, of course.

After dinner (we dine fairly early here) we always adjourn to the veranda, if it's pleasant, which it was to-night. It was a brilliant sunset, and Mrs. Denton-Gibbs was just remark-

ing upon it when Mr. Kenton came out with a pair of field-glasses.

"I don't admire sunsets any more," he said.

"And why not, indeed?" inquired Mrs. Denton-Gibbs, indignantly.

"Some fellow told me," replied Mr. Kenton, soberly, "that Turner paints so much better ones." With that he strolled to the other end of the veranda and put the glasses to his eyes, pointing them out over the water.

"Do you recognize that sail, Miss Fenwick?" he inquired, carelessly. I went over to him and he gave me the glasses. I couldn't see any sail, and said so.

"It's got behind High Point," he explained. "Too bad. Isn't that a splendid elm?"

I turned the glasses in that direction. I couldn't seem to find it, though I knew it well. It was the tree under which Mr. Kenton had been standing the day we drove home in the rain.

"It's just over that red gate," said he, in a queer voice. Still I couldn't find it, but all at once I saw the reason. Where it once had stood was nothing but a yellow, splintered stump! Nothing but lightning could have done it, and there had been none since that day. My hands

began to tremble so that I had to lower the glasses.

"Do you remember the bolt that struck it?" he said, in a low voice. I nodded.

"I believe you knew it at the time," I said. He didn't deny it.

My dear Alene, we weren't two minutes away from the tree when the bolt fell that must have wrecked it. I remember that he looked back at the time, but he said he couldn't see that it had struck anything. Not one single exclamation escaped him, though he knew he had beaten Death by two minutes!

I'll admit to you, my dear Alene, that as I stood there looking at that shattered stump I was so moved that I couldn't trust myself to speak. At last Mr. Kenton said:

"It's plain that but for you——"

"Oh! please, please don't," I answered.

"I admit," he smiled soberly, "that it must forever be a case of 'don't mention it.' But I have a book not made with hands wherein I write certain things that are not to be mentioned. It is a very little book, indeed, and few are the things I have written there. I have, however, made several entries since—since I got back from Paris." I looked perversely through the glasses. After a moment he added:

"You must let me write this there—will you —Cynthia?"

It isn't very often that the worst thing one can possibly say is nothing, but this was one of those times, and that is precisely what I said. There are times when silence is not golden. I do not remember ever having been so incapable of speech before. I'm sure I grew red to my red hair. You would, I am sure, have been thoroughly ashamed of me, had you been there, which of course you couldn't have been, for it wouldn't have happened had you been there. Do I wish you had been there? The answer to that question requires deliberation. I am not in a deliberative mood.

I kept my promise to mamma—I told Reggie. Remonstrances were to have been expected, weren't they? It was reasonable—even logical to expect them. But not one word of objection did Reggie make, and that wasn't like him, either. He didn't receive the news with applause exactly, but simply answered briefly that I must suit myself. Is not the fine Italian hand of mamma to be detected in this? Decidedly, that's my opinion. And somehow it annoys me far more than any amount of remonstrance that Reggie could have offered. I was prepared for that, but this meek submission can mean only

one thing—that mamma and Reggie have ha their heads together again. I've nothing to sa against Reggie's right to the maternal mora support, but this savors of conspiracy. It's evident that poor Reggie has been persuaded that I am a dangerous character in a dangerous mood, and that if I'm not tenderly handled I'm more than likely to upset the whole apple-cart. Mamma is a person of discernment; but, while all this may be perfectly true, Reggie has got to be left to play his own game. Let mamma applaud his moves all she likes, but let her keep her hands off the board.

* * * * * *

The asterisks are to be interpreted as meaning: Enter Polly.

"Do I interrupt your letter?" she asked, as she stood at the door.

"You do," said I, truthfully; "but it is early yet. Do come in and stay awhile." So in she came, and threw herself down in my reading-chair and stared at the ceiling.

"Anything on your mind?" I inquired. She nodded violently.

"Business, politics, or the heart?" I asked, politely. Polly laid her hand, with a sigh, upon her heart. "Poor Polly!" said I, sympathetically.

"Yes," she sighed, "I—think—I suspect—that I'm in love."

"Don't you know?"

"No!" despondently.

"Humph! Don't worry, then."

"Worry! I'm not worrying—I'm hoping. But I can't be sure. You see, I've never been in love before. I'm so ignorant about it. That's why I came to you."

"Well! So you want me to tell you whether you are in love?" Polly nodded.

"But why on earth do you come to me?"

"Why—why—you're engaged—you see," she stammered, with some awkwardness.

"To be sure—to be sure I am," I replied. "So you want me to diagnose your case? In that event I must know the symptoms. How do you feel?"

"Well," said Polly, having completely recovered her self-possession, "I'm always thinking about him when he's absent."

"Inconclusive," said I, firmly. "So is a murderer of his victim! Next."

"What an awful comparison. (A pause of reflection.) Then I notice the little things about him that I don't notice in any other man—the way his tie is fixed—the style of his collar—the exact shape of his shoes, and oh! a lot of trifles like that."

"That's more serious—go on."

"I like him to be near me—not too near, you know, for I'm a bit frightened of him then. I —I don't think of anything else—that is, anything I could put into words; but when he speaks and looks at me, and there's nobody else around, my heart beats very hard, and, if I don't blush, it's because I can't, being so tanned."

"Suppose he were to ask you to marry him?" I suggested. "What should you say?" Polly was gravely reflective again. At last she answered decidedly:

"I should say yes, I'm sure."

"It looks like a plain, uncomplicated case," I commented, in a professional voice. "As a D. L. (that's Doctor of Love) I have no hesitation in so diagnosing it." Polly reflected once more. At length she inquired abruptly:

"Do you have all those symptoms, too?"

Naturally, I was a little staggered.

"Why — er — possibly not all of them," I ventured.

"But you said 'yes' when Reggie asked you."

"That's true," said I. "But science teaches us that no single symptom is to be regarded as conclusive, but that the weight of testimony must be regarded." And I added to myself: "I do hope she'll go away now." But Polly was

not to be stopped. She hurried on like a bloodhound on a trail.

"Are *you* always thinking about him when he's away?" she demanded.

"Not exactly always," I admitted. "Sometimes I think of my mother and the other members of my devoted family."

"Pooh!" sneered Polly. "Do you blush or does your heart beat like a trip-hammer when just you and he are alone and he looks at you and speaks to you; and if other people are about do you wish that, for heaven's sake! they'd go away?"

"Close the window if you find the draught too strong," I suggested, hospitably.

"You know you don't," declared Polly, pointing an accusing finger at me. She rose, yawned, strolled over to the door, opened it, and remarked, with monitory emphasis:

"Of course, I'm not a D. L.; but all the same, if I were you, I should be afraid I'd made a wrong diagnosis of my own case. Good-night." She went out and shut the door. I called after her, but she wouldn't come back, and I called myself names for failing to perceive in time the rejoinder that would have convincingly answered her. This is obviously what I should have said:

"Polly dear, the disease of love is of two kinds—first, the acute, and second, the chronic. It always begins with the acute form, and, if the patient does not recover, runs into the chronic stage, where it lingers indefinitely. The symptoms of your case are plainly those that belong to the acute stage, through which, of course, I must have passed in order to reach the chronic stage, whose symptoms are quite other."

But of course this was one of those magnificent after-thoughts that one has not the most infinitesimal use for. Sleep weighs down the eyelids of

YOUR CYNTHIA.

VIII

So hard have I been laughing inside, my very dear Alene, and such an effort have I been making to hide my internal mirth with a sympathetic exterior, that I am scarcely in a condition to give you a lucid account of what happened this morning. And yet Reggie really had a narrow escape from serious injury. I ought to be very grave and thankful about it and all that, but oh! dear Alene, had you but seen it! However, it's a gift o' Heaven you didn't, for you, too, have a perfectly superhuman instinct for the ludicrous, and, between us, we should have been disgraced beyond repair. Reggie's out on the veranda now with a rubber bandage around his ankle, and, I've no doubt, thinks me the most inhuman monster not to be out there asking him if it hurts.

But really, there are limits to my endurance. Every little while I have to go away somewhere and laugh in solitude. What aggravates the situation is that Reggie knows what an absurd figure he cut, and you can't smile at the pictures

in a comic paper without his thinking you're laughing at him—which you are, of course. You see how that complicates things.

It doesn't help Reggie's temper any to be boiling with rage at Mr. Kenton when he knows he ought to be grateful to him, and, all things considered, I judge that solitude is what he needs.

It was and is a perfect day outside, but inside the morning began with lowering clouds and what the weather report calls "generally stormy conditions." I greatly suspect that it was all the fault of the rain-makers—Miss Polly Cheatham and Mr. John Kenton by name. For once, everybody was present at breakfast, Mr. Kenton having for some unknown reason abandoned, for the occasion, at least, his early morning tramp or ride or sail. I don't know which was the schedule for to-day, but it's generally one or the other.

Polly started the ball rolling. She came in with a letter in her hand, which, with an apology, she continued to read. As she read, her brown eyes opened wider and wider. When she had finished she slapped it down on the table, exclaiming:

"Well, I'll be bunkered!"

"Oh! I hope not," said Mr. Kenton, anxiously.

"I will so," insisted Polly, and addressed the table:

"You know Bessie Carleton—married Stanley Farrington?" A chorus assured her that we did. "Well—they've separated. I've a letter from Carrie Phipps, and she says they'd been having awful rows for a long time, and that everybody's talking about it and everything."

"Bessie was a charming girl," said Miss Caroline, in her hearty, generous way.

"Indeed she was," put in Mr. Kenton. "I remember her with the greatest pleasure—a fine, wholesome, generous, spirited girl."

"Wasn't she rather clever or—or something?" inquired Mrs. Denton-Gibbs, doubtfully. Mr. Kenton admitted the horrid charge.

"She was, poor girl," said he.

"Carrie says," said Polly, frowning, "that she's gone all to pieces in every way—says that Bessie told her herself that she was the most miserable of women."

"*Cherchez l'autre femme?*" inquired Mr. Kenton. Polly shook her head.

" '*Cherchez l'autre homme,*' Carrie says," she rejoined. "No scandal about it, you understand; but, all the same, Bessie never was crazy about her husband, and when the 'right man' came along she couldn't endure the sight of

Stanley, though the other affair didn't go any further."

"Far enough, I should think," said Mr. Kenton. "Two lives ruined—maybe three. I'll have another cup of coffee if Miss Caroline is feeling generous."

"Scandal at the breakfast-table!" remonstrated mamma.

"It grieves me," objected Mr. Kenton, smilingly, "to disagree with Mrs. Fenwick. I am sure it always will, but this is not scandal. It is a question of practical matrimonial ethics. I happen to know something about this Farrington-Carleton match. If I make any misstatement, will somebody who knows better correct me? Farrington was a handsome man-about-town, of an average type—just the sort of man that many of us know—not too clever—not ambitious—and moderately well-conducted; in fact, an ordinary sort of chap. He was Bessie Carleton's slave from the time her governess failed to spoil her. Bessie was what you have heard—beautiful, clever, sensitive, delicate, magnetic—it's no wonder that Farrington was attracted. His people were the right sort—he was almost revoltingly rich, and Mrs. Carleton was for the match from the start. Meantime the Fates fought, as foolish, criminal, fatuous Fates often

do, for the wrong man—namely, Farrington. The right man did not appear. Bessie did not fall in love!

"And so," he concluded, "not knowing any better and being urged thereto by those who should have known better, she made what everybody agreed was a fine match."

"It was such a pretty wedding," murmured mamma, apprehension in her voice.

"Yes," said Reggie, breaking a third egg, "I was one of the ushers—got the scarf-pin Farrington gave me now." Mr. Kenton was not through, and I saw that Polly knew it.

"But," he said, and paused. Everybody looked at him, and he went on, with commanding precision. "But they forgot one thing—those scheming parents who congratulated themselves on what they had done for their daughter and those addle-pated popinjays who agreed with them—yes, they forgot one thing. They forgot that in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred the right man *will* come. If he comes too late, let the wrong man look out." Nobody said anything for a moment. Then Polly murmured:

"Poor Bessie!"

"Poor Bessie, indeed," agreed Mr. Kenton, and I think there was real grief in his voice.

"Nobody says anything about poor Farrington!" grumbled Reggie.

"Yes," said Mr. Kenton, "poor Bessie, poor Farrington—poor, blind, foolish parents—poor everybody—it's a precious poor business all around."

"How about the right man?" demanded Polly.

"Well, yes," said Mr. Kenton, reflectively. "Certainly he's entitled to our sympathy, too. It's, of a surety, hard lines to come all the way from Chaos to the fate prepared for you from the beginning of Eternity only to find your clock of Destiny a few miserable years slow. Yes, I'm sorry for the right man. Skewer me, if I'm not!" Of course everybody laughed at the ejaculation, which rather saved the speech, anyhow, and then Polly said:

"Carrie says she saw Bessie the other day, and she's grown *so* thin!—you remember what a stunning figure she had—and that lovely pale-rose complexion, too—all gone—and great hollows under her eyes—and——"

"For pity's sake!" interposed Miss Caroline, "can't we find something more agreeable to talk about at the breakfast-table?" So we dropped poor Bessie.

You will observe, by means of the astuteness

with which you cover yourself as a señorita with a mantilla, that your observant Cynthia took no prominent part in this conversation. And yet she did not find it uninteresting—by no means so. For it seemed to her that she observed therein traces of a second conspiracy. Polly and Mr. Kenton surely incited and directed the entire dialogue, for what purpose (if indeed I am not altogether at fault) I leave you to guess.

On the other hand mamma's face and deportment were splendidly worth attention throughout it all. She saw what was coming as soon as Mr. Kenton got fairly well under way, and I am sure she was persuaded that the entire discourse was launched at her, if, indeed, the whole thing were not entirely prearranged for her exclusive benefit. What made her more uneasy yet was the fear that I might possibly suspect something of the same sort. It was a trying position for poor mamma, who, after all, has been most conscientious through the whole affair, and I respected her feelings, so far as I could.

Miss Caroline was plainly anxious and ill at ease, though a little at sea, while her brother and Mrs. Denton-Gibbs bobbed about easily on the surface without a single care.

As for poor Reggie, he never once recognized

his own portrait, as Mr. Kenton so faithfully drew it. He was, through it all, the innocentest lamb ever led to the slaughter, his only emotion being one of genuine regret for the misfortunes of his old friend Farrington.

After breakfast we all drove over to the upper beach. It's a rather lonely part of the shore, but Miss Caroline has some private bath-houses there and the beach itself is perfect, wide and hard and stoneless and shelving off very gradually into deep water. We took our luncheon and made a sort of picnic of it after we had had our bath. Reggie and Mr. Kenton both swim well, as, of course, does Polly, and you know I am not altogether at a loss in the water. So we splashed around like a lot of children at play, and had a sort of aquatic carnival. Polly could stay under the water longer than anybody else, because she couldn't talk there, she said. Mr. Kenton could swim fastest, and Reggie in the most kinds of ways, while I could float indefinitely. I always excel at laziness, you know. So the honors were pretty well distributed between the four of us. Mamma and Miss Caroline sat on the beach and formed the gallery, while Mrs. Denton-Gibbs paddled around and gasped and spluttered and looked miserable and said "Isn't it splendid!" Miss Caroline's broth-

er walked up and down the beach and kept saying: "Now don't go out too far, ladies." So you see there were enough of us to exemplify all the delights of surf-bathing.

There was just enough surf to make fighting it a delight, and outside the breakers it was just like being rocked to sleep in Nature's wonderful soft, buoyant, mighty, tender cradle. Isn't it just the most soothing, restful sensation in the world to lie at your ease, supported and upborne by the great blue Tireless, with the whisper of the surf in your ears, your eyes updrawn to the great blue dome above you until you seem a part of it—nothing but blue around you, gazing at it, breathing it, rising and falling unfathomably in it—until the things that you have known become almost impalpable and nonexistent—until you feel that, with never a pang for what you left behind, you could lie there forever and a day, rising and falling—falling and rising—ever so gently—in the great Blue until your fellow-elements should bear you through the surf of Time and lay you serene and content upon the shores of Eternity? If to the soul that quits a breathless body is granted the gift of sensation, something like this, I sometimes think, it must feel as it flies on its wingless course. Lotos-eating? The two are not to be compared.

All this was passing through my mind. Home, friends—even Reggie (think of that!)—were all forgot. Time had ceased to be—human events had never been. I had relapsed into my subconsciousness when I became aware of an approaching splashing. Of course it would be Reggie.

"Gad! but you've given us a scare," he spluttered. "We thought you had fainted out here."

"Oh! please go away," I begged. "I'm having such a beautiful time."

"Sha'n't do anythin' of the sort," he replied. "I'm going to swim around here till you get ready to come in."

Well, of course, that spoiled it all, so I went in at once. After luncheon we strolled up the beach to look at the breachway. Oh! I didn't tell you about that, did I? The other day mamma and Reggie were down there when they were opening the breachway from the Salt Pond into the sea. Mr. Kenton happened to be down, too, and we found him when we arrived. He was asleep on the other side of the breachway (which wasn't quite opened then), so I walked around the end and woke him up—Heaven knows why!

Well, just then the breachway opened itself,

and there we were—Mr. Kenton and I—caught on the wrong side of it. Reggie went after a boat, but Mr. Kenton said the nearest one was three miles away (I can't think why he didn't say so before Reggie started), and if we had waited for him we should have missed luncheon at the Everets'. So Mr. Kenton carried me across—much to poor mamma's disgust. But there wasn't anything else to do with that boat three miles away. I wonder how far it really was. Poor Mr. Kenton got soaked nearly to the waist, but he didn't seem to mind. I wonder if he really did. I asked him, but he didn't say anything. Still, it was all his fault, anyway. He ought to have known that old breachway might open any moment. I wonder if he did? Do you think it would be nice of me to ask him?

Mr. Kenton and Polly thought it would be nice to walk back to the house, and I thought so too. Reggie wasn't especially gay over the idea, but he seems to have adopted the policy of agreeing with me whatever may be my notion. So we started—we four—the rest of them driving back by the road as they came.

Polly said it was a "ripping day" for a walk, and so it was—the sunshine a brilliant thing—the breeze salty and just strong enough to set

the grass to waving, so that big fields of it looked like billows of green chasing each other along. When you walk home from the beach you cross a little wooden bridge over a narrow arm of the Salt Pond (there are generally some bare-legged children fishing for crabs from the bridge), keep on the road for a hundred yards or so, and then open an old wooden gate, that leads you through a mossy old lane to a field that fronts on the shore side of the Salt Pond. Then you climb a stone wall and pass through another field, where there are generally some sheep feeding (I always look anxiously to see whether any of the sheep have horns), up to another gate, which takes you into the back-yard of a fine, big, weather-stained old farm-house, that is just simply made for a water-color. Oh! by the way, this water-color house is the residence of one Perkins, whom I think I mentioned in connection with Mr. Kenton in a previous letter.

Naturally, it follows that when you pass through Squire Perkins's back-yard and open another gate it brings you to the identical field wherein I discovered Mr. Kenton and Minerva the morning I went walking, and where, conversely and by the same token, they discovered me. When we got to this particular gate, Reggie

and I had rather distanced Mr. Kenton and Polly. So I climbed the gate and sat there to wait. Then I saw my yellow friend just across the field.

"Why, there's Minerva!" I exclaimed, thoughtlessly.

"Eh?" said Reggie, blankly.

"A friend of Mr. Kenton's," I explained, pointing out the quadruped.

"Oh!" said Reggie; "you mean the cow. Whose is it?" I answered:

"Mr. Kenton's."

"Not really!" said Reggie, with an incredulous grin. "What the deuce does he want with a cow? What the mischief does he know about cows?"

"Possibly not as much as about horses," said I. Poor Reggie scowled at that, and began to stroll over toward the cow.

"You'd better be careful," I warned him, smiling to myself when I remembered what a gentle beastie it was.

"Who's afraid of a cow!" he retorted, over his shoulder.

"You've got on a red sweater," I insisted, laughingly.

"Pshaw!" said he, scornfully, and strode on.

Just then Mr. Kenton and Polly caught up. Mr. Kenton glanced at Reggie, and shouted:

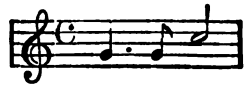
"I wouldn't go near that cow, if I were you, Langham."

"That's all right," shouted Reggie, keeping right on and obviously not to be buncoed. "That'll be all right, my boy." At the sound of his voice Minerva looked up from her feeding. At the same instant, out from behind that old haystack, gambolled a wee little clumsy bit of a yellow calf. The instant it saw Reggie it gave a plaintive little bleat and ran toward Minerva. Minerva began to walk straight toward Reggie. He stopped, held out a conciliatory hand, and observed:

"So, boss! So, boss!"

Then the calf bleated again. Minerva promptly lowered her head, stuck her tail out straight, and most inhospitably charged our Reggie, who lost no time in turning his back and making for the wall.

Mr. Kenton vaulted the gate on which I was sitting and started for the scene of action on a dead run. At the same time he put two fingers between his teeth and whistled three notes. They were a good deal like the first three notes of "Taps," only, of course, sharp and shrill, something like this:



For a moment or two it looked like a close thing. Reggie, in his panic, was running the long way of the field, which was a considerable handicap; moreover, it was taking him farther and farther away from Mr. Kenton. Of course, on the other hand, he had a considerable start; but Minerva was not at all discouraged, and was gayly making up ground with every enthusiastic jump and bellowing every time her feet struck the ground. Still, Reggie was giving a good account of himself, and might possibly have won if the race had been run to a finish.

But Mr. Kenton kept on whistling as he ran, and pretty soon the sound began to penetrate Minerva's preoccupation. She ran as if something was on her mind, and pretty soon she slowed down to any easy gallop and looked inquiringly over her shoulder.

Of course Reggie began to draw away from her then, and would surely have reached the wall in safety if he hadn't turned his head to see what was happening to his pursuer. As he did so he stepped on a loose stone and went down in a heap amid a chorus of groans from the grandstand (the same being the top of the gate). It

would have been all up with him then but for the fact that by that time Minerva had recognized Mr. Kenton and had given up the chase. She promptly trotted back to him, and the calf came along, too, and in a moment more, but for the sight of a red-sweatered Reggie limping painfully over the wall, you wouldn't have known that anything more exciting than a potato-race had been going on.

Pretty soon Reggie managed to get back to the grand-stand, following along the outside of the wall.

"I'd like to know," he panted, "what Kenton means by turnin' a wild beast like that loose in a field where people are liable to walk?"

"Why, Reggie," said Polly, "he told you not to go near her." Reggie turned purple.

"How could I know he wasn't jollyin' me? Who ever heard of a savage cow, anyhow?"

"Awfully sorry, Langham," apologized Mr. Kenton, hurrying up. "Minerva really is gentleness itself ordinarily; but she's just had a calf, and it's her first one, and she thought you were going to harm it." Reggie sat down on the ground and held his ankle.

"That cow," he growled, "is too damned foolish to give milk. Oh!" he groaned, "maybe one of you'll go into this cursed farm-house and get

a nag to take me home. I think I've broken my leg."

So Mr. Kenton got Perkins to take Reggie home. He wouldn't let any of us go with him—which was just as well. Polly and Mr. Kenton and I continued our walk home, Minerva and the calf escorting us across their preserves. None of us said a word for some time. I suppose we didn't dare look at each other. At last Polly heaved a regretful sigh.

"I'm sorry you had to stop it," she said to Mr. Kenton. "I'd like to have seen the finish."

"Maybe," replied Mr. Kenton, "you can get Reggie to run it over again."

"He'd better train for it," said Polly; "Minerva would have won by a neck to-day."

Then Polly and I gurgled to ourselves all the way home. Who could help it? Not you, I'm sure. As for Mr. Kenton, his mirth was largely internal, but you caught a lambent gleam of it through his eyes occasionally—that is, if you looked at them, which you did, once or twice, quite by accident.

Poor Reggie's injuries are extensive. His ankle is, in my opinion, only slightly sprained, but his dignity has sustained a compound fracture. But the worst was spared him. He got

home in time to tell about it first. It was not particularly amusing—not as he told it.

Miss Caroline was highly indignant that Perkins should allow such a dangerous beast at large on his property, and loudly avowed her intention of going to see him about it. But I saw Mr. Kenton talking quietly with her, and I don't think poor Perkins will be called to account.

So Reggie's petted by half the household, and as for the rest—well, they owe him a debt of gratitude for a spirited and sprightly divertisement. Meantime I am cheered by the thought that I am not to be married in October, and I am still

Thine,

CYNTHIA.

P.S.—Do you think it horrid of me to be so terribly amused?

P.P.S.—I can't help it, anyhow, so please say no.

IX

THAT girl, dear chap, that girl! It makes me resentful when I think that you haven't as yet read a single one of the many words I have written about her. Or perhaps you have—perhaps you've heard of her arrival and our first—our only—*tête-à-tête;* but you haven't heard of our ride in the thunder-storm nor about her meeting with Minerva nor (oh! blessed morning) about that precious breachway. I have always wondered what it was for, and now I know. The topography of this New England coast-line was predestined for my especial benefit. It was ordained from the very beginning of things that there shouldn't be any natural connection between the Salt Pond and the sea, to the sole and only end that I might carry Cynthia across the breachway. And you haven't heard about it yet!

I wonder if you'll be bored by all these letters that I strike out at white heat from the anvil of my heart. I wonder if you're saying to yourself: "What a tiresome nuisance love has made poor Jack! And he used to be such a

decent fellow, too." I don't believe you are; but, if you are, it's because you're deficient in the quality of imagination. And yet I am consoled by recalling the time-worn proverb that all the world loves a lover. I wonder how "all the world" would distribute its affection between Reggie and me?

By the time you read this you will be wondering where I stand and on what foundation I have built the hope that I now confess. Yes, it's true that our words since the day of her arrival have been few and not what many would call significant, and yet they've had an accent all their own, unless my ears have been too hopeful. I haven't anything to reproach myself with in the way of sloth. Just so far I can go in the way of speech and still respect myself, and just so far I have gone, and mean to go until the last ray of hope fades away. But while my diction is restricted, especially in the way of adjectives, there is a passage in the good Book which my early training calls to mind: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might."

You've never thought me a particularly energetic person, I know. Nor, perhaps, am I such under ordinary conditions. I have always believed in that quiet contentment that views a hurrying, cheating, fighting, quarrelling, en-

vious, snarling world with the contempt it deserves and goes its own serene way satisfied with the pleasures of reflection, a congenial companion, and the ability to see beauty where others would hurry by, unseeing.

This is, indeed, a busy world. But the things best worth having are not all external. As a matter of fact, very few of them are. Most of them grow in the gardens of our own hearts, and all they need is a little sun, a little rain, and a careful hand to pluck away the weeds of greed and lust and envy and discontent to make them grow and blossom, until, in their contemplation, we wonder what it can be for which youth is hurrying itself prematurely to old age, breathless, frowning, covetous, and unsatisfied.

You and I know plenty of men who are never so miserable as when they have "nothing to do." How often we have seen men whose lives had been of the hurly-burliest sort, whose busy brains had never been unoccupied by some enterprise to be achieved—some enemy to be run down and throttled—some office to be won—some deal to be put through. Take such a man and suddenly, by accident, financial reverses, or some such stroke of chance, put him on the shelf where he must be what the world calls idle. What's the result? Why, he is idle. Yet he

can't be idle. He has never learned to be idle. So he dies. Despite his active brain, he has never had anything inside his head. All his life he has lived outside himself. He really has no self at all. He's only a frame on which to hang stocks and bonds and puts and calls and offices and deals and companies and shares. When you take them away from him, the exposure is positively indecent.

You have heard some people wonder why so few men retire voluntarily from business in America. They can't—that's the only reason. They've got nothing to retire to. When they retire they die. Wherefore, they don't retire till they die. Talk about laying aside something for a rainy day! It takes more than money to make the rainy day endurable. If a man expects his rainy day to be a long and pleasant one, he wants to go about laying up for it the ability to be what people call idle.

Now idleness is an avocation—no, it's more than that—it's a vocation—a vocation that requires special training. I hear my busy friends exclaiming: "Oh! anybody can be idle." Let them try it for a day or a week. I'll wager they'll not last a month without yearning for their offices and their factories—their "something to do." The fact is, a good, well-trained,

competent idler is one of the rarest things in the world—so rare that it's strange his profession is so poorly paid in the things of this world. But he has the satisfaction of knowing that his fees in things not material are the richest that fancy can paint, and I doubt if it annoys him in the least to know that his dearly prized rewards find no place whatever in the "busy" man's catalogue of things of value.

You may retort that an idler is born, not made —that a man must have a talent for it. That I grant you; but, if he have ever so feeble a spark, he may by care and watchfulness and practice develop it into something that the profession may well be proud of. Workers? Of course we must have workers; but there's no reason why all workers should live and die workers. Some of them must and will because that's the way they're made, but let the others invest their God-given talent. Let them practise idling in odd moments. Let them remember occasionally that they have brains fit for some purpose other than material. Let them go off by themselves and sit on a fence and whittle a stick and remember that, after all, they are only a size larger than the robin that is singing so sweetly in the apple-tree over their foolish heads, and that if they should die to-night the robin would sing just as

sweetly from the same apple-tree to-morrow. Then let them go back to work again, and next time maybe they can stand it to idle as long as ten minutes—sit on that fence with "nothing to do" but reflect upon how the world goes on and how beautiful nature has made that crumbling old gate that man made so ugly.

But, old son, even the most finished of idlers has his busy moments. The praises of idling sing I sure enough, and my song has been sufficiently loud and zealous, I trow; but if I am persuaded that there are precious few things better worth doing than the right kind of idling, yet once in a pink moon there comes one such, and when it comes I propose to gird up my loins and demonstrate to the satisfaction of the veriest Philistine that, when he deems it worth his while, no worker can strike more doughty strokes than can his friend the idler.

Such an occasion has now arisen in the life of the subscriber. As I remarked in the beginning—that girl! that girl. "She is more to be desired than"—I thought I could quote Solomon, but I find I can't. The fact remains that I can't imagine how I'm to do without her. I try to persuade myself that mine is a most unselfish desire, and, by dint of considering Reggie in all his fulness, I nearly manage it. Without

doubt it's my duty to save her from Reggie. You'd agree with me if you knew Reggie, even if you didn't know Cynthia, and, if you knew Cynthia, you would never speak to me again if I allowed her to marry Reggie.

I try to analyze my feelings. I try to be judicious and judicial. I ask myself: "How should you feel, even if you knew your case to be hopeless, if she were to marry Reggie—even if she had told you she didn't care for you?" But that last phrase gives me such a chill that further self-analysis is out of the question. No, dear boy, I just want her because I need her, every bit of her, from the top-most strand of reddened gold upon her head to the tips of her blessed little boots. There isn't a thing about her that isn't adorable, and if there is I'll never see it. There isn't—but why run on like this with you three thousand miles away? If you were only here I'm sure I could convince you that never was a girl so worth the having, and if I couldn't, well—I'd just take you to see her and stand by with restoratives. And to think it's going to take a week for me to tell you this! I've half a mind to cable it. They'd be sure to think it was a cipher. "I must tell someone really, and it might as well be you," as the "Florodora" girls sing.

My calendar tells me that I haven't been at Belleville a week. Verily, time is only relative. A week ago! That was in the glacial age, when even the heart was cold. This is the age of Cynthia (about twenty-two, I think), when all things blossom on the warm, brown bosom of our old mother Earth.

To tell the truth, the idler, turned worker, hasn't much to complain of as yet in the fortunes of war. To be sure, Reggie has attached himself to me with much persistency, but he's got himself a brand-new sprained ankle (kind Heaven be praised!), which will, in the nature of things, detain him from my desolate side for a time.

The same all-wise Providence to which I have just referred has also assisted Reggie, in divers and sundry ways, to make himself ridiculous in the eyes of his *fiancée*. I told you all about Gunfire. Well, yesterday we were walking home from the beach, Cynthia and Polly and Reggie and I, when Reggie's evil genius inspired him to make friends with Minerva. Now Minerva has recently become a proud and happy parent (mother and child doing well, thanks), and the clumsy and infantile object of her maternal solicitude got the idea that Reggie was the only and original bogie-man, and so informed Minerva.

The ordinarily sane and placid Minerva gave heed unto the voice of her offspring, and went after Reggie for keeps. I jumped in and called her off, of course, but not until Reggie had fallen down in his precipitate, not to say panic-stricken, retreat and sprained his ankle. It really was quite absurd, and Reggie didn't take it very kindly, for which I am the last to blame him. I wouldn't have been in his shoes for something.

But there's worse to come or better. It all depends on the point of view—most things do. Early this morning I was awakened by the most outrageous uproar outside my window. At first I couldn't decide whether it was a truck-load of iron rails on a cobble-stone pavement or a scrap-heap doing a cake-walk, but, as soon as I got the cobwebs out of my brain, I knew that it was an automobile.

Sure enough it was—a long, green, touring car—just under my window, and standing there simply shuddering at itself.

Of course it was Reggie's. He'd telegraphed for it, and his chauffeur had brought it down to Stonington on the boat and finished the journey by road. Reggie hadn't said anything about it, thinking to give us all a joyous surprise.

Now it's one of the charms of this "dear, de-

lightful country" that the roads are not yet adapted to automobiles.. Neither has the trolley, twin fiend of the auto, yet appeared. Ninety-nine one-hundredths of rural New England have been ruined by the trolley. The quiet, peaceful, remote, old-fashioned shady streets in which we used to take so much pride—the corner grocery and post-office, where the local talent used to assemble of a summer evening to learn the news and settle the nation's fate—what are they now?—victims of the trolley. For five or ten cents the farmer can flash into town to buy store-clothes and learn town manners. Those dear old streets re-echo the whiz of the trolley with its seats full of noisy, slangy mill-hands and Sunday-school picnickers—its atmosphere of gum and peanuts. Rural remoteness, with all the picturesque individuality that it meant and that it wove for centuries into the warp and woof of New England character, is a thing of the past—gone to the same grave that holds the three-decker and the stage-coach. But the trolley hasn't got *here* yet. Come it will, I suppose —they've got one in Jerusalem—but, meantime, we are spared. However, Reggie is doing the best he can with his automobile.

Of course, nothing would do but Reggie must take Cynthia "bubbling" immediately after

breakfast. He was warned that the roads were in places pretty bad, but he pooh-poohed the idea that anything hereabouts could bother his twenty-five horse-power demon—a Mercedes, I believe it is. All through breakfast we were entertained with tales of his feats with the Mercedes. To him Fournier was a timid back number. He was too modest to use those words, but that was the logical conclusion from his premises.

So off they went—he and Cynthia—quite by themselves—he wouldn't even take his mechanic—don't know that I blame him. Imagine a mechanic in the same automobile with you and Cynthia—or any third person, for that matter! Perish the thought and its thinker. Two's company; a mechanic's a crowd. So the mechanic drove the thing around under the *porte-cochère,* and they got in as it stood there coughing, groaning, shaking, and smelling.

Reggie was certainly gotten up regardless. All he wanted was a pair of lead shoes to be ready for the diving-bell. I'll do him the justice of saying that no automobilist ever looked uglier. He wore a combination of foot-ball armor and astronomical apparatus. His head-gear looked like a conning-tower, and he carried it all with an air, I can tell you. He was the last

word, the *ne plus ultra*—in short, the limit. The last we saw of them we couldn't see them for dust.

With no definite plan in my head, Gunfire and I followed, after a decent interval, in their wake. It was easy to see that Reggie had been doing no very accurate driving, but when I recalled his distraction I found it easy to forgive him that. I should doubtless have found the ditch. Gunfire was in fine fettle—full of the dauntless spirit that made her name what it is in racing history—and not much grass grew under her dainty hoofs as we sped along. In the fulness of time we came to the little hill that leads up past the home of that Münchausen of the sea, Cap'n Holly.

There, in the middle of the yellow road, was Reggie's machine. Under the maple-tree in Cap'n Holly's door-yard, upon a bamboo bench, sat Cynthia. Beside her sat Cap'n Holly. But no Reggie did I see. I might have seen him if Cynthia had not been there, but some things obscure the vision to all else. It wasn't until I got within thirty paces that I observed the expert, lying flat on his back in the yellow dust under the machine, doing something with a monkey-wrench. This is how Cap'n Holly described it to me afterward:

"I was sittin' aloft in the lee riggin' when I sighted this square-rigger bearin' down on me before the win'. She had quite a bone in her teeth, I see, an' her skipper 'peared t' be hevin' 'bout all the win' he could use. Wa'n't steerin' what y' might call th' shortes' course, nuther —lef' a wake like a sea-sarpint. Sometimes y'd think he's goin' t' luff her up, an' agin' he'd squar' away an' run fer it. Win's kind o' onstiddy, an' sometimes he'd git a puff out o' the no'theast that'd pooty nigh poke his nose under. 'F 'twas my ship I sh'd ben thinkin' o' tuckin' in a reef.

"But th' Lord looks arter the foolish, they say, an' I guess mebbe it's so, becuz the win' begin to peter out and she begins t' loose headway till she didn't even hev much more'n steerage-way on. What d'you think he done then? He wouldn't shoot her up when he'd orter, but now, you kin belay me fer a pudd'nhead, ef he didn't luff up right in front o' my door. I went out, 'n I says:

" 'Kerry away some riggin?'

"He says somethin' under his breath, an' the lady she laffs an' he goes overboard 'n' begins t' look at the square-rigger's hull.

" 'Fouled yer rudder, mebbe,' I says. 'Er is they barnacles on yer keel?'

"He don't say nothin', but the lady she laffs fit to bust herself, and she says to me:

"'You must be Cap'n Holly. I've heered of you. If you'll help me I think I'll jest come ashore till our ship's ready to sail agin.' So I helps her over the rail, an' she comes ashore and sets down jest whar you see her when you hails us.

"The squar'-rigger keeps up a roarin' an' choo-chooin' all the while, an' I says to the feller, I says:

"'I see ye got yer steam-pumps goin'. How d' ye spring a leak?' He says, 'I dunno,' kinder sour-like, an' gits a monkey-wrench and goes to work at her bilge-keel like all possessed. I see he wan't feelin' noways chatty, so I set down by the lady, an' we was havin' quite a visit when you bears down on us."

Well, I tethered Gunfire at a safe distance and approached the square-rigger. Cynthia greeted me with a Delphic smile, and I turned my attention to Reggie.

"What's the matter with the machine, Reggie?" I inquired, sweetly. He hadn't seen me before. Lying on his back in the dust, he turned a baleful eye on me, and said he:

"Hell! You here?" I didn't deny it, and after a pause he jerked out the words: "Feed-pipe's choked."

Well, I'm only human. It was my charitable purpose to do what I could to untangle his beastly machine-shop, but upon his cordial greeting I cheerfully retired to the society of Cynthia and Cap'n Holly. It wasn't much trouble to get the ancient mariner started on the subject of his adventures in odd corners of the world, and if Reggie hadn't made so confounded much noise, we should have forgotten all about him. But he sweated and swore to himself in the dirt and hammered and tinkered away for half an hour or so while we sat in the cool shade of the maple-tree hearing tales of the maritimely marvellous. After Reggie had rid himself of a particularly violent ejaculation, Cap'n Holly remarked confidentially:

"Kinder onsettled in his mind, ain't he? Glad I don't hev t' sail b'fore the mast on his ship."

About this time Reggie crawled out from under the machine, and—he—were—a—sight! It was a hot day, anyhow, and the sweat induced by his profane labors had attracted to his features much yellow dust, most artistically dotted and striped with grease from the machinery. There he stood, monkey-wrench in hand, hot, scowling, filthy, and picturesque.

"Damn the damned thing!" said he, and threw the monkey-wrench on the ground.

"Hear, hear!" said I.

"Oh! naughty—naughty!" said Cynthia, with the most delectable little *moue*.

"Guess ye'll hev t' put thet there craft in dry-dock, won't ye?" said Cap'n Holly.

After Reggie had removed a few of his decorations at Cap'n Holly's pump, he was for sending for his mechanic to come and fix the machine so that he and Cynthia could continue their drive. I volunteered to ride back and get the man, but Cynthia promptly put her little foot down on the plan.

"Not for me," she said, decisively. "We're not sure he can fix it when he does come, and I don't propose to spend the rest of the morning waiting for him, anyhow. You can hunt up a team to tow the thing home or you can sit here and wait till your man comes—whichever you like. I'm going home, and I'm not going to be towed home, either—if I can get anybody to take me in any other way." I glanced at her quickly, you may be sure, but her eyes were on the ground—at her feet, where I would so gladly have been.

You may imagine that it didn't take me long to have Cap'n Holly put Gunfire in his stable and trot out his old roan mare and his antique buck-board.

"Send my man over, please," said Reggie, plaintively, as we drove away. "I'm hanged if I'm going to be towed in either." We left him sitting, disconsolate and crestfallen, on the bamboo bench under the maple-tree.

That drive, my boy, that drive! Imagine it—jogging through that lovely country in the freshness of the summer morning (did I say it was hot?) with the girl I loved but dared not tell, and the slowest horse in all that county! Can you beat it? I don't see how you can even tie it.

All the way one speech was in my heart and on my tongue and only just inside my lips. How I kept it there Heaven only knows. Every glance at those violet eyes, that piquant little nose—those pink and shell-like ears—those red and fragrant lips—I'm sure they're fragrant—brought it with a rush to the tip of my tingling tongue. Looking away was all that saved me.

And yet we did arrive at one understanding as a result of that never-to-be-forgotten drive. Just as we came to the top of Potter's Hill, whence you can see the red roof of Miss Caroline's hospitable mansion gleaming through the elms that surround it, I managed to say:

"About that letter, now?"

Cynthia didn't ask "What letter?" nor even

say "I don't understand you." She didn't even pretend to be ignorant. She answered promptly:

"I have been thinking about it." I went on:

"When your mother interrupted us that day you had just said that you sent an answer to my note from Paris."

"Yes, that is true. I did."

"Do you happen to remember how you addressed it?"

"Rue Evremonde—No. 29—care Mr. Ralph Burton," she answered, promptly.

"That was correct," said I, and added: "Did you mail it yourself?"

"No," said Cynthia, slowly. "I gave it to—to a friend to mail." She averted her eyes.

"Ah!" said I, "friend of yours possibly, but scarcely of mine."

"I suppose," said Cynthia, after a long pause, "I suppose she must have lost it." There was another long pause. It was not until we turned in at the driveway that I spoke.

"I'm going to ask you not to tell me the name of that friend," said I. "Up to the present time I have managed to get along without hating anybody. I shouldn't like to begin now."

"Oh! it wasn't much of a letter," answered Cynthia, lightly. "I just said that I wasn't engaged to Reggie—yet."

"Is that all?" said I. "Good God!"

The roan mare stopped under the *porte-cochère.*

I drove the mechanic back to the stranded "square-rigger" because I knew he wouldn't talk. I didn't feel like talking. Reggie was still sitting on the bamboo bench under the maple-tree, but he didn't move at our approach, and on getting nearer I saw that he was sound asleep. The mechanic jumped out, went to the machine, tinkered about sixty seconds with something or other, and turned on the power. The explosion began with a roar that waked Reggie with a bound.

"Gad!" he cried. "Frighten a man to death!"

By this time the mechanic had the auto turned toward home and ready to start.

"Feed-pipe choked, eh?" said Reggie, climbing in.

"No, sir," said the man. "Spark-plug gummed a bit. It has a way of doing it sometimes."

What Reggie said is not for your innocent ears.

As I was going in to luncheon, Polly came through the hall reading a telegram.

"From brother Frank," she said, holding it out. I took it. It read:

"O.K. Mum's obviously the word."

"Now," said Polly, gleefully, "kindly observe Reggie's barometer. I won't do a thing to him."

Wonder what she meant. When I find out, I'll let you know.

J. K.

X

Dear Ralph:

Having discovered what Polly meant, I hasten, as I promised, to let you in on the news. I have prepared a number of new labels for that parcel of which I wrote you, but I can't seem to make my choice among them. All of them, in the light of to-day's events, appear so pale and inadequate. How could I ever have so misjudged delightful Polly?

Immediately after breakfast to-day I went out on the lawn to smoke a cigar. Miss Caroline has a few chairs and benches and a little table out there for books and fancy-work and so on. It all constitutes a sort of morning-room, with the walls and ceiling left off—yet it has a ceiling, the same being the branches of the noble elm above it. Close at hand are a few beds of brilliant flowers and a merry fountain, where a bronze bacchante (not exactly of the type that was rejected of Boston) dangles a bunch of grapes in her hand and spouts a stream of crystal water from her ripe and sensuous lips. Well,

here I sat at my ease, my cigar between my lips, the morning paper unopened upon my knee, my eyes fixed upon the far-off sea that glittered in the morning sunshine like a world of diamonds. The voice of Polly roused me:

"What's the news?" demanded she.

"Polly," I said, with the plaintive air of one who knows that he is never to be understood, "you ought to know that news is naught to one like me." She laughed, and fell to work splicing a broken driver.

"We'll alter all that," she said. I was suddenly moved to confidence. You're all right, old fellow, of course; but you are so confoundedly far away. If the fellow who made Paris had had any sense, he'd have made it a suburb of New York.

"Polly," I said, growing instantly grave, "I'm going to tell you something about this thing."

"Oh, do!" she cried, eagerly.

"I'm doing it not to gratify any idle curiosity, understand," I insisted, "but to justify my present attitude and my acquiescence in something, I don't know what, but something which you have undertaken to do for me."

"You'll see pretty soon," said Polly, with unshakable confidence. I pursued my way:

"In this—this case; to make it vivid, we'll call

it the Fenwick Stakes—well, in the Fenwick Stakes I didn't get a run for my money. There was foul play somewhere. I was informed by a person, whom I was idiot enough to believe, that Cynthia was engaged to Reggie. Like a fool, I went to Paris promptly. From there I wrote a note of congratulation to Cynthia."

"Why on earth didn't you ask her, before you went, if it was true?" broke in Polly.

"Well you may ask," I answered. "But I didn't. I wrote. In answer there was written to me a note."

"Yes! Yes! Oh! do go on."

"In that note I was told that Cynthia was not engaged."

"Well—well? Why on earth did you dawdle in Paris after that?"

"Polly, I never got that note."

"Well—then—I don't see how you—you knew—oh! of course—of course I do."

Now you can readily see, old chap, that this was something like real, flesh-and-blood sympathy, so I went on:

"Polly, that note was given to a third person to mail. I don't know—I haven't been told—but I would wager Gunfire against a zinc dime that that third person was——"

"Mrs. Fenwick!"

"Polly," said I, "your perspicacity is amazing."

"Of course it was Mrs. Fenwick. Of course it was she, too, who told you that Cynthia and Reggie—" I nodded.

"Hush," I said hurriedly. "Here she comes."

"The old reptile!" murmured Polly.

Miss Caroline and Reggie were not far behind Mrs. Fenwick, and we all sat there—all the *dramatis personæ* of this little play. I wonder if it's to turn out a comedy or a tragedy?

We sat there discussing the servant problem (Miss Caroline's second girl had just left) until the subject palled, and there was a silence that was thus broken by Polly:

"Poor brother Frank!" she sighed, with a quick side-glance at me.

"Why these tears?" I asked, promptly.

"The poor boy had planned a cruise up the Sound in his yacht, and now he can't go. I had a letter from him last night."

I said no more. I read suspicion in Mrs. Fenwick's face. But Miss Caroline took up my lines.

"What's the trouble?" she asked.

"Oh!" said Polly, hard at work with her splicing, "some fuss about C. T. & O. You know Frank's firm deals largely in that stock,

and something's gone wrong with it." Reggie glanced up uneasily.

"I've got some C. T. & O." he said.

"So?" said Polly, indifferently. Reggie borrowed my paper and consulted the financial page.

"No change in yesterday's market," he said, at length.

"Oh! it's something that hasn't come out yet," replied Polly, carelessly. "Don't know anything about stocks myself—but Frank says it's something that only the insiders know as yet. He said it was on the strict Q.T."

"C. T. & O. on the Q.T." I interpolated.

Just then a boy came up the drive on a bicycle. Seeing the group under the elm, he dismounted and approached me.

"Special delivery for Mr. Reg'nald Langham."

Reggie took it, frowned at it, and opened it with an apology.

"Letters," said I, reflectively, "letters and Destiny are one. I care not who wins the world's battles so I may write its letters."

"How about telegrams?" said Miss Caroline. "I always hate to open them."

"Telegrams are only epigrammatic letters," I answered. "I never get a letter without reflect-

ing, before I open it, that its contents may alter the course of my whole life." Mrs. Fenwick smiled an uneasy smile.

"I should think," she said, "that in that case you would reduce your correspondence to the narrowest possible limits."

"Some lives," I replied, "can only be altered for the better."

"Goodness!" cried Miss Caroline, "how melancholy we are this beautiful morning!"

"But," I continued, with possibly an undue emphasis, "potent as are the letters that are written, unwritten letters—letters that are planned but never set down on paper—are even more fateful."

"Heavens above!" said Mrs. Fenwick; "if you follow that line of thought to its logical conclusion, how about words that are never spoken, deeds planned that are never done?"

"They are an equally lamentable crew," I admitted, "doomed to wander through all Eternity homeless and houseless, the orphans of Chaos. But," and again I grew emphatic, "we were talking about letters."

"I think," said Polly, toiling with deft fingers over her driver, "that the saddest of all are the letters that are written and never delivered." Mrs. Fenwick took up her embroidery.

"Decidedly I agree with you," said I.

"Well," said Mrs. Fenwick, with a laugh that was not particularly gay, "there is the dead-letter office." I fixed my gaze upon her.

"Some of these undelivered letters never reach the dead-letter office," I said. Under my scrutiny the woman paled a trifle, but she never looked up from her work.

"No," she said, carelessly, "there are wrecks and things."

"And thieves," said Polly, innocently. Mrs. Fenwick cast a lightning glance at her, but made no reply.

"True," said I, "and not all of them in the postal service, either."

"You speak with conviction," said Miss Caroline, giving me a puzzled look.

"And well I may," said I. "I once knew a man who suffered from such a theft. He was a chap who had no secrets from me, and I heard the whole story."

"Oh! do tell us, please," cooed innocent Polly. Mrs. Fenwick's lip grew white as she bit it.

"It's a long story," said I, with cheerful alacrity, "but I can tell it in a word. My friend was in love with as sweet a girl as the world holds. He wrote her a certain letter. She wrote an answer and gave it to a third person to mail.

He never got it. Well, it turned the world black for him."

"But how did he find out about it?" demanded Polly, with fine spontaneity. Mrs. Fenwick appeared absorbed in her work.

"Well," I replied, "he did find out—when it was too late."

"Oh, dear!" sighed Polly; "I wouldn't be in that third person's shoes. By the way, who was the third person?" I paused before replying, and Mrs. Fenwick shifted apprehensively in her chair.

"Her name," said I, "would be recognized by all of you if I should mention it."

"Dear me! How interesting!" said Mrs. Fenwick; but I think her voice shook a trifle, and I observed that for some reason she laid her embroidery down in her lap and folded her hands as she looked off over the sea. Now isn't there something of the Inquisition in Polly's blood? The dear little wretch left off her splicing, leaned over toward me, and, to all outward appearances, the very incarnation of girlish curiosity, cried:

"Oh! do—please do tell me her name, Mr. Kenton."

"Her name," I answered, and I saw that Mrs. Fenwick's fingers clutched each other convul-

sively as I spoke, "was—the same as that of the girl. She was her mother."

Cynthia's shadow fell beside my chair. Her face was paler than I had ever seen it.

"I thought we were going to play tennis," she said. Then Reggie ambled up.

"Beastly nuisance," he growled. "My brokers want me in town on some business, but I won't go to-day—I won't. Couldn't get there in time, anyhow—have to take the boat to-night. Why can't they leave me alone?"

Polly looked obliquely at me.

"How's the barometer, Mr. Kenton?" said she.

I said nothing, but Reggie obligingly picked up the paper and read her the weather report.

"Thanks," said Polly, demurely.

So we all adjourned to the tennis courts—all but Mrs. Fenwick. She had a headache, she said, and the glare hurt her eyes.

After Polly and I had beaten Cynthia and Reggie a set, which we did without much trouble, by playing everything at Reggie, Cynthia grew weary. Strangely enough, so did I, but my faithful Polly declared herself never so fresh, and kept poor Reggie lumbering around in the sun while Cynthia and I sat in the shade and cheered him on.

"Too bad Reggie's got to go to town," said I,

mendaciously, as the subject of my remarks drove an immature but aspiring Lawford outside the back-stop.

"Isn't it?" said my lady. "Oh! well played, Polly," as Reggie in vain contorted himself to reach a lob that fell just inside the base-line.

"And speaking of going away reminds me," Cynthia continued. "Mamma, too, has plans of that sort."

"I shall endeavor to cultivate a spirit of Christian resignation," said I, cheerfully.

"She was saying to me this morning that she had a letter from Aunt Clara. Aunt Clara, it seems, isn't at all well, and mamma thinks we ought to go to her at once.—Too bad, Reggie—you should have had it."

"That's different," I said.

"How different?" she asked.

"I was not aware at first that your mother's plans for departure included you, too."

"Oh, yes! She wouldn't leave me here. Mamma is funny that way, and always has been. She seems to think someone will steal me if she gives them the chance."

"Humph!" said I, crossly. "What a ridiculous idea!"

"Oh! do you think so?" she said. "I'm sorry."

"Of course," I said, "ordinarily your mamma's views would be entitled to the greatest respect; but really, don't you know, this is such a weird idea——"

"Brute!" said Cynthia.

"Well?" said I.

"Well what?"

"Are you going?"

"Your back hand is pretty weak, Reggie. (*Pianissimo.*) What did you say, Mr. Kenton? Oh! yes—well, don't you think I ought to?"

"Don't care—so long as you don't."

"Why, Mr. Kenton!"

"Still, I suppose it would be pretty dull for you here."

"I don't understand you."

"With Reggie gone, you know."

(*Staccato.*) *"Why, Mr. Kenton!"*

"And mamma gone, too."

(*Diminuendo.*) "Oh! but mamma won't go if I don't."

"Oh! well, that would help some."

(Eight bars rest.)

"Well?"

"Well, what, Mr. Kenton?"

"Are you going?"

(*Fortissimo.*) "Should you be sorry, Mr. Kenton?"

"Of course—you know I should."

"Really—really?"

"For poor Aunt Clara."

"Oh! Indeed!"

"If you ask me, I think it's a downright outrage on your mother's part to take advantage of a poor bed-ridden invalid like Aunt Clara——"

"But Aunt Clara isn't bed-ridden."

"No?"

"No."

"Well, why didn't you say so. Of course, if she can get away——"

"Very well — since you think I ought to go——"

"Now, see here, Miss Fenwick—I'm a good-natured man, but——"

"Well played, Polly! Did you see her kill that lob?"

(*p.*) "Are you going—Cynthia?"

"Perhaps. Are you?"

(*pp.*) "Yes—to Paris."

"To Paris?"

(*ppp.*) "Perhaps."

"Point, game, and set," chanted the warning voice of Polly, and the perspiring Reggie threw his racket into the shade and followed it.

I don't know whether she means to go or not, dear boy; but if she does, you may look for me

again in Paris before the roses have faded from the Tuileries Gardens. For she knows, now, as well as I dare tell her, what it means to me—her going or her staying. Should she stay, of course I should have no right to infer anything, save that the game is not yet up. On the other hand, should she go, with no word, there could be only one inference. It chills my heart to think what that one inference would be. I will not think of it. She's not yet gone, at any rate.

Nor is Reggie, though he promised to go by the night boat from Stonington. I can hear him now, closing the blinds of his room, which is the next one to mine. Reggie!—the luckiest old club-foot in a world of misdistributed fortune! Yes, Reggie, for your golden luck, I'd change places with you, muddy brain, self-conceit, pompousness, ignorance, shallowness, soul-blindness and all. Skewer me, if I wouldn't!

* * * * * *

As I wrote the last sentence the tall, grandfather's clock half-way up the broad stairway intoned the hour of midnight. As I write this one the first rays of the rising sun come streaming out of a perfectly celestial East to fall through my open window across the floor. It has been the most wonderful night of my life. Love has stolen through the last five hours like

the theme of a symphony, faint, vague, elusive, but unmistakably dominant. Comedy has rustled through them in her silken skirts. Nor has Tragedy been forgotten. Though we glimpsed Him but momentarily, his baleful eyes seem to freeze me yet and my hand trembles as I write, for what might have been.

When I had outpoured my heart to you as far as my remarks about Reggie and his marvellous luck, I wearied of the pen, went to my window and looked out. It was a night in a thousand. In perfectly clear skies, the moon sailed steadily, though half full, high over the distant water. Attending her was Venus, brightest of all the starry host. The air, soft and balmy, barely breathed through my window curtains. It all beckoned me forth. So forth I went, taking from its hook inside the door the latch-key, placed there for the benefit of nocturnal prowlers like myself. Before I left my room, I opened the top drawer in my dressing-case and took up the brace of pistols you gave me that Christmas —those heavy 48-calibre Colts—of the sawed-off variety. Of course, you remember them perfectly. I cannot explain why the idea occurred to me, but I stood with them in my hands for some seconds, vaguely wondering if I had not better take one with me.

"Pshaw!" I said to myself, at length, "what's the matter with you! Pistols in this law-abiding neighborhood, and on a night like this, too! You make me laugh." So I put them down and went out into the fragrant moonlight.

Without thinking much where I was going, I strolled leisurely down the driveway, crossed the road, leaped the gate that opens into a big field, and went cross-country over several walls and fences to the bluff that skirts the Salt Pond. Here I stood observing the sleeping water for a time, and then walked along the bluff till I came to the old lane that runs down from Browning's Mills.

You may remember the delicious spring that bubbles fresh and cold and clear under the old willow-tree not twenty feet from the salt water. But it's there, whether you remember it or not, and I took a deep draught, and, strolling on a few yards, sat down in the shadow of some tall rushes. I hadn't been there long before the crunching of gravel came to my ear. I glanced up the lane, and, dimly outlined against the sky at the top of the hill, I made out a dark figure. As I gazed, the figure stepped from the gravel to the turf at the side of the lane and came noiselessly on to the spring. Though I had no cause for concealment, I saw no reason for announcing

my presence, which I saw was undiscovered. The figure was that of a man. He fumbled for the iron dipper that hangs from a nail driven into the willow, made sure of it, and filled it from the spring. As he raised it to his lips a moon-ray fell through an opening in the foliage full upon his face. It was a face I had never seen before and never wished to see again. A sinister face it was, with its low, bulging brow, its little evil eyes set close together on either side of a short, fat nose, its big, misshapen ears standing out at right angles from the head. Small-pox pits, generously distributed, put the finishing touch to this unpleasant countenance. For some reason I wished I had brought one of those Colts. The man emptied the dipper, threw it carelessly on the grass, fumbled in his hip-pocket, and produced some object which I could not make out. In a moment, however, it produced an unmistakable sound.

The fellow toyed with it for a moment, replaced it in his pocket, stood looking at the water for a time, and then went off over the hill, treading soundlessly on the turf.

Though somewhat disturbed at first, I endeavored to reason myself out of it. I was a harmless night wanderer myself. Why should not this man be another? To be sure, he carried a

gun. But had I not myself contemplated the same thing? But that face—yes, the face, taken in connection with the gun, left upon me a feeling of vague uneasiness that I tried in vain to throw off.

Impelled by formless suspicion, I got to my feet and followed noiselessly to the top of the hill. As my eyes rose above its crest, I made out not one figure but two. I halted. They were almost at the upper end of the lane. In a moment they turned westward upon the post-road. Had they turned to the east, I should have lost all interest in them. As it was, I hurried after them, and cautiously turned the corner until I could command a clear view of the road. The wind had begun to rise a little, and the moon was darkened by hurrying clouds, which, however, were not heavy enough to obscure it entirely. There was light enough to show me that the road was empty. There it lay, straight and yellow and solitary—not a speck upon it. Hastily, I stepped into a clump of sumachs that grew at the roadside, crept up to the wall and peered over. Up to the westward, a hundred yards or so, I could dimly make out two black figures stealing along in the shadow of the wall.

That was enough for me. It was plain that something evil was afoot. Miss Caroline's

house was the first one on that side of the road that my stealthy friends would reach, and about three-quarters of a mile distant. It was plain that I could not follow closely enough to keep them in view without imminent danger of detection. Again I cursed the luck that had prevented me from bringing my faithful Colt.

For a moment I thought, and, you may be sure, thought hard. Just behind me was a five-foot wall which runs at right angles to the road until it reaches the woods that clothe the ridge upon which, farther to the west, stands Miss Caroline's house. In an instant I had dropped over behind it, and, crouched in its shadow, half ran, half walked, until I reached the woods. As I made sure of their friendly darkness, I stood up to my full height and looked. It was growing darker every moment, for the clouds were thickening. The two figures had disappeared.

Considering the course, I made record time. Through the darkness I scrambled and felt my way in frantic haste, falling over rocks, scratched by bull-briers, buffeted by unseen arboreal hands, until I came to the edge of a little group of pines the other side of which I knew edged upon Miss Caroline's lawn. Here I halted for breath, and then stole cautiously

over the silken needles until I came to a big pine, quite two feet in diameter. From its shelter I could peer at leisure. For a time I could make out nothing whatever except, dimly, the great bulk of the house against the sky, for it was by this time about as dark as clouds, however heavy, can make a night when the moon is in the sky. The stables are some distance to the rear of the house, however, and it was against the sky-line between them that I made my first observation. It consisted of two dim figures, so dim that I could scarcely see them save when they moved.

They were still for some minutes. Then one of them disappeared to the other side of the house and one moved in my direction.

"Obviously," I said to myself, "this one is the look-out."

The look-out retreated from the house until he reached the shadow of the pines, scarcely a dozen feet away from where I stood, trembling with excitement behind my friendly tree. Oh! how I yearned for my Colt! Again I took counsel with myself. I weighed the possibility of stealing past the look-out when his back was turned, entering the house and getting my beloved pistols. But I gave it up. Who could tell what moment the look-out's accomplice

would appear? There remained but one alternative—to watch my chance to finish the look-out. It was plain that if I could not do it in absolute silence, I might as well regard my earthly career as ended. One cry would bring the second ruffian to the help of the first. I laid my plans accordingly. A few loose stones lay scattered about under my pine-tree; I felt about with infinite precautions until I found one large enough to make a formidable weapon and so shaped as to afford me a good hold. Then I took off my shoes, and, grasping the stone in my right hand, I awaited my chance.

The look-out evidently felt the chill that came with the rising wind, for he put both hands in his pocket and edged farther back to the shelter of the pines. Ten feet—eight feet—six feet away—he stopped, and I knew my time had come.

Stealthily I crept up behind him.

"Br-r-r," he said softly, shivering in the wind.

The next instant I shot my left arm around his neck, slapped my hand over his mouth, and with my right hand brought down the stone savagely upon his neck. He had just managed to get his hands out of his pockets when the blow fell. Instantly his muscles relaxed, and with a gasp or two he collapsed in my arms. I had

aimed to find the jugular vein, and I think I succeeded.

Into the pines I dragged him. With my belt I tied his feet. With two handkerchiefs knotted together, I tied his hands behind around a tree. Then I made a crude but effective gag out of my handkerchief, and hastily searched him. Imagine my feeling when I discovered nothing more deadly than a jack-knife.

It was not a particularly creditable thing I had done, but there wasn't any other way that I could think of.

The look-out was not my pleasant-faced friend of the spring. I knew *he* was armed, at any rate. Wherefore it was with extreme caution that I proceeded toward the house. As I quietly inserted the latch-key and the door swung open, it suddenly came to me that the sensible thing to do was to proceed to my room as I would ordinarily, close a door or two, drop a boot on the floor, slam a blind, strike a light, and otherwise behave in such manner that ruffian No. 1 could not fail to hear me, and, perceiving that the entire household was not wrapped in slumber, would give up his job as hopeless and make off with all speed. I saw all this in a flash, but in the next flash I determined to carry out my original programme. I had got

one of those thieves, and I was determined to have the other.

Up to my room, therefore, I stole, found my way to the dressing-case, and felt in the drawer for the six-shooters.

They were not there!

My heart sank within me, for I wanted that man with the small-pox face. Moreover, who but he could have taken them? He might be standing in yonder dark corner at that very moment, covering me with my own guns. Instinctively I wheeled about, placing one hand upon the dressing-case. It touched something hard, and I took a deep breath as I remembered that I had not put the Colts back in the drawer after taking them out.

With a gun in each hand, I left my room again and stole down the hall. An unmistakable creak brought me to a sudden stop; I wheeled about in the darkness. Slowly, stealthily I could hear a door opening not six feet away. It softly grazed the carpet as it swung. It came over me with a rush that it was Cynthia's door. Instinctively I covered it with the gun in my right hand. Something rustled out of the door and slowly away from me. As the soft, gentle frou-frou reached my ears, I lowered my hand. No burglar ever wore clothes like those.

I chanced it.

"Cynthia!" I said, in a stage whisper.

The retreating frou-frou was instantly silenced.

"Cynthia," I whispered again, "it is I, Jack." Instantly I could hear her coming back down the hall. Half-way she stopped again.

"Here I am," I whispered. "It is really I." She followed the sound of my voice, and in a moment laid her hand upon my arm. Gadzooks! I can feel it yet.

"Oh! Jack!" she whispered. "I *am* so glad! I was going to call you. There's a man on the roof of the veranda outside my window. I had bad dreams and they waked me up, and I lay awake a long time—I heard you go out and by-and-by I heard this scratching. I looked through my blinds and saw this man coming up a ladder to the roof of the veranda. Then I went to call you, and—oh! I am so glad it's dark."

"It's all right," I assured her. "It will be easy enough to scare him away." In an instant I had abandoned all my brave plans of capture. Standing there in the black darkness (I give you my word it was so dark you couldn't have seen a flash of lightning), Cynthia put her lips to my ear and whispered:

"Couldn't we capture him—just you and I?"

Once more my plans were instantaneously reformed.

"Are you afraid to shoot?" said I.

"Try me," she whispered.

I pressed one of the Colts into her hand.

"When you hear the note of the whippoorwill," I whispered, "lean from your window prepared to cover him with the gun." The fingers of her hand tightened over my wrist.

"Good boy," she murmured through the blackness into my ear. The next moment my wrist was free and I heard that delicious frou-frou diminishing down the corridor.

Once more I groped my way down the broad staircase. A score of times I cursed myself for assenting to Cynthia's plan. What folly it was! What if anything were to happen to her as a result of it? Once I even turned to go back, but, as I recalled the courage, yes, even the delight, in her whispered words, I could not bring myself to do it. Out of the door I stole and thought how our friend on the roof must be cursing his luck as the clouds that hid the face of the moon grew thinner and thinner. It was quite light enough for me to make out the ladder. It was just where Cynthia had said.

With the utmost caution I removed it, stole with it around the corner, placed it against the roof there (the veranda runs around three sides of the house), and ascended. My stockinged feet made absolutely no noise as, revolver in hand, I approached the corner of the house. A tangle of woodbine runs over the roof and up the corner. Through this I peered.

The man was just laying his hand on the blind outside my window, and thus stood between me and Cynthia's room.

I raised my fingers to my mouth (you know I have some gift of mimicry), when clear and sharp from the ground below rang out the plaintive call of a sure-enough whippoorwill.

I'll own to you that I was never so startled in my life. Involuntarily, I turned my head in the direction of the bird, when a clear, low voice said distinctly:

"Throw up your hands!"

Instantly I recovered myself, stepped around the corner, and there, backing toward me on the roof with both hands elevated in the moonlight was my friend of the spring, staring into a gleaming barrel over which glanced the violet eye of Cynthia. At that moment one hand (his right) began to drop slowly. (I could see its fingers twitching.)

"Higher up!" I said, quietly.

The man jerked his head toward me with an oath.

"And no noise, either," I added. "Now, with your permission, Miss Fenwick, I'll take charge of this fellow. Can you step down and out-of-doors a moment?"

"Of course," she whispered.

"Very well, we'll wait," said I. Cynthia disappeared. Covering him, I approached the small-pox person.

"Now," said I, "I am going to place the muzzle of this gun against your breast while I search you. It is cocked, and the least movement on your part is likely to be unpleasant for you, because I am a nervous man and I might misunderstand you."

I suited the action to the word, and the man was quite docile through it all. I found his gun where I had seen him put it at the spring. By this time Cynthia, bareheaded, draped from head to heel in some kind of a dark cloak, appeared on the lawn below.

"Now," I said to our captive, "just swing off the veranda here and drop. The lady will detain you until my arrival." It was about a twelve-foot drop, and he looked at it dubiously. Then he swept the lawn with a furtive glance.

"Your friend will be unable to assist you," said I.

He gave me an ugly look, got himself to the edge of the veranda, hung for an instant, and dropped to the turf. I saw him rise to his feet, saw Cynthia, calm and serene, cover him with the Colt once more, and then descended by the ladder. We took him half-way down the drive, stood him up facing us in the open, and retired a few yards.

"Now," I whispered to Cynthia, with the gun still covering our captive, "what do you wish to do with him?"

"Oh! let him go," she answered. "We've had our fun.

"But he ought to be punished."

"Do you want to go to court and get mixed up with the newspapers and have the house full of reporters?" she asked.

"Don't know that I do," said I.

"My man," I continued, advancing upon our prisoner, "owing to the lady's intercession, you will not be handed over to the police. But I shall not forget your face—nobody could. If you are ever observed in this country again after—say an hour from now—your arrest will not be far off. 'Bout face now, hands up—don't forget that—march!"

So we marched him down to the road.

"Now," said I, "make your apologies and tender your thanks to the lady." He took off a greasy cap.

"Beg yer pardon an' much obliged, mum," he growled.

"Off with you—on the run—now—run, I say," said I.

The fellow broke into a dog-trot. He was still running when he passed over the brow of the hill. When I took my eyes from the spot where he had vanished it was to hear Cynthia say:

"You said something about his friend?"

"Do you really want to see him?" I said.

"Is—is he dead?" she faltered.

"I don't think so," said I, "but I was forced to be rather rude with him."

"Have to have a look," said Cynthia, courageously.

I led the way to the clump of pines. He was there just where I had left him. I dragged him into the moonlight. It seemed horribly like handling a corpse, but I had seen that his eyes were open. I removed his gag first. Then I unstrapped his feet. Finally the handkerchiefs came off. He felt himself all over, got slowly to his knees, and finally rose stiffly to his feet, with his eye on my gun.

"Did ye git Mike, too?" he asked, at length. I nodded.

"Well," he answered, "the drinks is on us. Is the cops here yet?"

"The cops will not be here," said I. "Your friend Mike is a mile down the road by this time. If you hurry you can catch him, but he is travelling fast."

So we took him, too, down to the road and pointed out the way that he must go. "Ain't got a drop o' booze about ye, have ye?" he inquired, thirstily.

"Get out," said I. He got out.

Cynthia and I walked back to the house in the moonlight, while I told her what she did not know about our visitors. At the fountain where the water flashed musically and the bronze bacchante danced in the moonlight she lifted her revolver and "broke" it.

"Look!" she said, holding it up. I looked.

There was not a cartridge in it!

"Good God!" said I, in horror.

"That," said Cynthia, sweetly, "is the second time you have made that remark to me."

"Had I not reason?" I demanded.

"Perhaps," she said.

"Both times?" I insisted.

"Perhaps," said Cynthia.

Her violet eyes flashed just once at me. Then we went in.

Going through the dark hall she took my arm. At her door she gave me her hand.

"I wish you a beautiful dream," came the whisper from lips I could not see but which almost touched my cheek. And then she was gone. A door closed.

Down the broad stairs I went, the clock striking three as I passed it. On the veranda I sat, until daybreak and Watkins arrived together.

Chanticleer salutes the rising sun. I am going in search of that beautiful dream, but I think I have dreamed it already.

J. K.

XI

CYNTHIA DEAR:

If your eagerly awaited and warmly welcomed letters from Belleville have received only brief and rather superficial replies, it hasn't been because I had little to say, but really because I had too much. I wonder if I have seemed lacking in sympathy and comprehension of the things that have been surrounding you and moulding your life? Have I, dearest friend? If I have, it is only seeming, not being. In reality I have been living your life just as you have described it to me, smiling with you, reflecting with you—yes, troubled and apprehensive with you, too, for the note of apprehension that runs through all your characteristic comedy is too strong to be missed, and at last you have put it into words. And that is what opens my lips to speak my heart to you—yes, as I have not spoken it in a long, long time.

All these recent months I have felt that we were drifting apart—we who scarcely had a thought or an emotion that we did not share. You have felt it too, of course. Though together

as much as ever, we were really getting to be less like real friends and more like congenial acquaintances. Strange, isn't it, that separation and letters should do more to bring us together again than contact and speech? Yet so it is. Your letters from Belleville have been to me a promise of the resurrection of the Cynthia that I used to know—not so long ago—but who, I feared, had left me forever.

Do you remember our childish confidences when we learned from the same governess, wore our hair in pigtails, and longed for the day when our skirts should reach our boot-tops? What ideals we had, and on what lofty lines we planned our lives! And yet, do you know, I have never found any higher or nobler scheme of life than the one which, in our ignorance and innocence, we children adopted. Do you remember that we agreed that love should rule the world—that everything else should be subservient? All around us we saw the evils wrought by the Amalekites, the unhappiness that too often followed the "successes" of matchmaking mammas. Our childish eyes could not be fooled by any scarecrow, decked in silks and jewels and labelled happiness. We knew the real happiness too well. We saw our elder sisters and girl cousins reared with an eye exclu-

sive to good matches. It was the atmosphere they breathed. Everything was regulated with that end in view. "Eligible" young men were encouraged by the watchful supervisors of their destinies. Others, though frequently to our childish taste far more attractive, were consistently discouraged. We gathered that they were not "eligible." Their prospects were bad. None of these things were we supposed to see, but we saw them all the same. We were regarded as so inconsiderable that it was not even noticed when we were behind the scenes. We saw how the strings were pulled, and saw how the limelight was flashed upon the favored young man to the dark exclusion of the "ineligible." We even attended many of the rehearsals, heard the lines repeated, and saw the stage set. Of course you remember that you and I were allowed to act as flower-girls at the wedding of Cousin Kate. How it would have surprised them to know that we meditated declining the honor, and only accepted it after learning that our gowns were to be made in accordance with our taste.

It was raining in torrents. We stood with arms about each other's waists, looking out of the nursery window, wondering if it would clear up before night for the wedding. We were in a frankly rebellious mood. There entered to us

Cousin Kate herself, smiling, self-possessed, confident.

"And how are my little flower-girls—all ready and eager for the great event?" cried she. We looked at our splendid cousin rather doubtfully.

"Why so doleful, *mes enfants?*" she asked, with a dazzling smile. You remember Cousin Kate's marvellous smile—so winning, so contagious, so mischievous, so utterly captivating. Poor Kate! That smile is only a memory now. Then Cynthia, approaching her radiant cousin, inquires in a monotone:

"Do you really love him very, very much?"

"Why, foolish child, of course. What a question to ask." But Cynthia is brutally frank.

"I think Mr. Fairfax is ever so much nicer," she announces.

"Oh, do you, indeed?" says Cousin Kate. "Well, why don't you marry him yourself, then, my precious infant?" But Cynthia only frowns at this ill-timed levity.

"Isn't Mr. Fairfax in love with you, Cousin Kate?" she demands. Cousin Kate bites her lip.

"Why, how should I know—of course he isn't. Where on earth do you get such ideas?"

Cynthia again:

"Alene thinks he is, and I do, too; but of

course you can't marry him if you love Mr. Gerald, can you?" Cousin Kate turns away and looks out of the window.

"Of course not," she says, shortly.

"Alene and I are awf'ly sorry for poor Mr. Fairfax," pursues the pitiless Cynthia. "Aren't you?" Cousin Kate turns from the window, makes a rush at you, lifts you in her strong arms, and crushes your face against her own, crying out:

"Bless your heart, you terrible child, what foolish ideas you have! You must forget all about such things and never, never remember them any more, never again. Do you understand?" And

"Yes," says Cynthia, wide-eyed and a little awed. Then Cousin Kate puts you down a little hurriedly and abruptly leaves the room. And you stand there where she left you, your hair all tousled by the suddenness of her embrace, and then you put one small hand to your dimpled cheek and you say in a puzzled voice:

"Cousin Kate's face was all wet."

I don't know if you remember all this as well as I do. It is one of the most vivid of the memories of my childhood. And the next day after Cousin Kate's wedding we played it all over again up in the nursery, only we had rather a

different ending. I had a wax doll, by name Phyllis de Montmorency Fitzgibbon, to whom I was deeply attached, though she was but a wreck of her former magnificence. She had lost one eye, and her left ear had degenerated into a fragment, while Time had taken its pick of her once luxuriant crop of peroxide tresses. But upon her worn face was imprinted a wide and waxen smile, which age could not wither nor custom stale.

You sat regarding her steadily as you held her between your knees.

"Cousin Kate smiled that way when she marched down the aisle," said you. It was true. Cousin Kate's smile had lost its spontaneity for once. It was fixed.

From that beginning the rest was easy. We spent the morning devising the play. Your manikin, Augustus Charles Clarence de Courcey, a brunette young man with only one leg and a discouraged nose, became Mr. Gerald; while for the unfortunate Mr. Fairfax we took your Lady Jane Grey, divested her of skirts, cut her hair, and put her into some improvised trousers. For guests we had the valuable services of brother Jimmie's lead soldiers, their officers serving for the Bishop, the assistant clergyman, and the best man.

I'm not sure but we even promoted some of the members of the military to the rank of maid-of-honor. We were somewhat short of ushers, as I remember it, but after all we did not miss them, and I remember you offered by way of consolation for their absence the fact that Mr. Gerald wouldn't have to buy them any scarf-pins or gloves.

The church was crowded with lead-soldier guests, friends, and relatives. The air was heavy with the fragrance of the cacti, ferns, and rubber plants, which which the altar was profusely decorated. The subdued hum of polite conversation was over all (I know, for I furnished it myself), but suddenly died away as the well-known strains of Mendelssohn's Wedding March floated out from the window-seat (I mean the organ-loft), where I produced them from a jew's-harp.

Slowly, with stately cadence, the bridal procession moved down the aisle. The proud Phyllis de Montmorency Fitzgibbon had never looked so well. A fine solemnity seemed to subdue even her waxen smile, and her gown and veil became her haughty beauty perfectly. Yet withal a sadness sat upon her patrician, if decimated, features, and she leaned somewhat heavily upon the arm of her father, a statuesque,

youthful old man, who, unless I am mistaken, was attired for the occasion with great pomp and ceremony in the attire of the Brownie policeman.

So, while the bride's lead-soldier mother snivelled bitterly through my lips, the procession reached the altar as the Bishop, who, I remember, wore the full-dress uniform of Colonel of the Seventh Regiment and looked uncommonly well in it, the assistant clergyman, the bridegroom, and the best man came from the vestry door. The Bishop caught his sword between his episcopal legs and fell up the altar-steps, but soon recovered his dignity and the service began.

Augustus Charles Clarence de Courcey bore himself, as Mr. Gerald, with the mien of a man on whom Dame Fortune hath ever smiled—confident, serenely joyous, despite his mislaid leg. But hold! Who is this dark, dishevelled, agitated man with the fresh hair-cut and the home-made trousers who lurks in the shadow beneath the organ-loft?

Aha! It is Lady Jane Grey—that is to say, of course, the wretched Mr. Fairfax.

And who is it who, when the even tones of the representative of the church-militant are heard announcing: "If any man can show just cause why they may not lawfully be joined to-

gether let him now speak or else hereafter forever hold his peace," rushes madly down the broad aisle crying in frantic accents:

"I forbid the banns!"

Obviously that, too, is the miserable Mr. Fairfax, and he adds in strident tones:

"This wretched marriage is being forced upon this unhappy girl. It is I—I only—Richard Fairfax—whom she truly loves. I forbid the banns, I say!"

And who is it who from the open doorway of the nursery inquires in scandalized tones:

"Why, you terrible children, what mischief are you up to now?"

Obviously it is Cynthia's mamma.

Poor, clear-sighted, brutally candid little tads! If I am smiling now at them through tears, it is through tears of sympathy, for they were wise with the wisdom of childhood. Their eyes were not blinded by the mists of conventionality and self-interest and fashion and worldliness. They saw through sham and sordidness, straight through to the heart of things. Isn't it a world's pity that we women grow up and away from the hearts of our girlhood? Did I say "up"? Alas! It's downward that we sink from them, and the foolishness of the girl is far wiser than the wisdom of the woman.

Poor Cousin Kate! As I grew up I watched her, always with the memory of that rainy day in the nursery. I saw her only the other day—beautiful, splendid as ever, smart, prosperous, busy, and fashionable. I even talked with her. She has all the serenity of an iceberg. As I looked at her I wondered could this be our Cousin Kate, and I saw two puzzled violet eyes, and heard a wondering, childish voice, which said:

"Cousin Kate's face was all wet."

So Cousin Kate is here and what I've told you, and Mr. Gerald is cruising in his yacht and Dick Fairfax sleeps in Arlington Cemetery. And Phyllis de Montmorency Fitzgibbon—she's here, too. I found her yesterday while rummaging through some treasures of my infancy. The years have dealt gently with her. I looked for a streak of gray in her golden locks, but I could not find it, and her waxen smile she will apparently carry with her to the hour of her dissolution.

And where are Lady Jane Grey of the shorn tresses and that quite incomparable uniped, Augustus Charles Clarence de Courcey? Do you still preserve them or have they quite vanished away, lying forgotten, perhaps, amid the cobwebs and the rubbish of some dim, forgotten

garret? As I watched you during the last few months I sadly came to the conclusion that your memory held no place for these old friends of the nursery days, and that the episode of that interrupted drama was quite forgotten. That is why I have thus tried to bring it all back to you, just as it happened, just between us two and Lady Jane Grey and Phyllis de Montmorency Fitzgibbon and Augustus Charles Clarence de Courcey and the lead soldiers. All this because I have wanted you to see the childish Cynthia as my memory paints her—grave, candid, clear-eyed, courageous, uncompromising—yet wistful. Yes, and so she was and grew and remained, and my love for her looked confidently forward to her future.

I am going to be quite frank with you, dear child, just as frank as you used to be with your own fearless self. For weeks I have longed for something that would give me the right to speak, and now in your most recent letters it has come. You have unsealed my lips.

Well, so we came to last winter—*the* winter—and mamma and I went to Florida. When we came back you told me of your engagement. What I said I don't remember. I only know that I tried to conceal what I felt—with what success only you know. Then I set myself

quietly to find out whether it was you or myself who had changed. There was only way to do this, and that was to study him. I knew him, as I knew fifty other men. I never liked him or disliked him. I had simply classified him, and the label on his pigeonhole (I told you I should be frank) read "not worth while." I thought I must have been unjust to him, so I re-examined what Uncle Harry would call the "Exhibit" in his case. Try as I would, the evidence remained the same. Yet the fact remained that my Cynthia had chosen him. I went further; I assiduously cultivated him, and found him barren soil. I went further than that. I asked judicious and tactful men friends about him. Still—the same result.

"Ah!" I said to myself, "why didn't I know it before? Cynthia, with her wonderful insight, has discovered in this man's character something that has escaped all the rest of us, something hidden deep down beneath the unpromising surface, something which reveals itself only to the eye of a love like hers."

But it was Cynthia herself who persuaded me that this theory was incorrect. It surprises me that I shouldn't have seen it before. I can only suppose that the first shock of discovery had benumbed my powers of observation. It did

not take me very long to come to the conclusion that you did not love this man as the Cynthia that I had known would love. Why, then, did I keep silence? Because, dear, though practically persuaded that this was the case, I was not certain, and I would not take the chance of making a mistake. I knew that, if I did, you and I could never return to our old basis of perfect understanding, and, you see, I hoped for that return above all things in this bright world. So I was silent.

I cannot tell you how I have felt through all these months. Many a time have I been on the verge of throwing prudence to the winds and speaking to you my thoughts. But you were so calm, so serene, so deadly contented through it all that I had no excuse. And yet I could not rid myself of the idea that some sort of fatal spell had been cast upon you—that you were not really Cynthia at all, but some ghoulish demon who had made away with you and had usurped your face and form. It became a fixed idea with me, almost an obsession. I told myself it was a ridiculous notion, and yet I could not rid myself of it. So great a hold did it take upon me that at times I was uncomfortable in your presence. To all intents and purposes, though, it was the living truth. I could not have been

more astounded to come back and find you so than if somebody had presented me to a total stranger and given her your name. You've seen Richard Mansfield in "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde"? Well, there it is in all its horror—save that I appeared to be the only intelligent spectator. But you see, none of the other auditors knew Dr. Jekyll as well as I.

So there you have it—the truth as I see it, and it's grim and grisly enough, I hope.

But, thank God, I see that some brave knight, who scarcely knows his own bravery (and I mean to be entirely impersonal), has dared the dangers of the enchanted forest and has found his way to the side of the sleeping princess. As I look I can see that she stirs in her sleep, and I am crying out to her as loud as ever I can to shake off the spell that has lain so long upon her, to awake and look once more upon a world that is full of brightness and beauty and happiness that are waiting for her gaze. I wonder if she hears my voice. I will cry again. Surely some stray accent of the many that I send ringing through that dim, enchanted wood will find its way into the darkened chambers of her brain —will touch her slumbering memory into wakefulness again before the deadly torpor descends upon her soul as well.

No? Then I will cry to that brave knight and say to him: "Stoop and kiss the sleeping princess on the lips, for the enchantments of this evil world all fade away to harmless nothingness at the touch of love."

And that, too, is the truth, oh! dearest Cynthia. It is the truth we learned together as children in the nursery. Rather I should say it is the blessed truth that we found in our own hearts almost before we knew we had them and which evil magicians have conspired in devious ways to blind us to. It matters not that the enchanters have been actuated by what they thought the best of motives. Very likely the wizard who placed the spell upon the slumbering princess was of the opinion that a good, long sleep would do her good. He forgot that the world does not sit idle by the bedside of the sleeper.

But away with metaphors. Since I saw unmistakable signs that you were beginning to see the light, I have spoken my heart to you. Frankly, I say to you that if you go on with this hateful marriage, for I can see that you utterly loathe it, you will commit an act to which suicide is a mere misdemeanor. For, theologians to the contrary notwithstanding, suicide but kills the body, and what you have been medi-

tating would be nothing less than a homicide of the soul.

The soul of Cynthia!

Poor soul! Do not remorselessly destroy it. If it has somewhat disappointed you and me of late, cherish it for what it was and yet may be. Breathe into it the warmth of hopeful youth. Lead it into the light of a love such as beauty and spirit like yours must one day inspire, and we shall see it grow and strengthen as the days go by until its vigor and its loveliness shall make its present self seem but the shadow of a bad dream in the light of high noon.

The mortgage of the soul of Cynthia to pay maternal debts! Is it not a thought to shudder at? I care not what obstacles you must overcome—what opposition you must beat down—you can do it, and do it you must. For the Cynthia that I know is strong. She is too true to act a lie.

Have I been harsh with you, dear child? I have merely tried to make you see things as I see them—to help you to save yourself *from* something worse than death *for* something worth life everlasting itself. I may have been too grewsome, but I have not put things as grewsomely as I have seen them. Words are mere shadows of the substance of thought.

Voices and shapes come out of those old nursery times to me again. I see the mimic church with the crowds of lead-soldier guests. I hear the jew's-harp playing the Wedding March. I see the form of Phyllis de Montmorency Fitzgibbon advancing down the broad aisle on the arm of her father, the Brownie policeman. Augustus Charles Clarence de Courcey balances himself haughtily on his one leg before the martial Bishop, and I hear the frenzied tones of the metamorphosed Lady Jane Grey ringing through the startled church:

"I forbid the banns!"

I could weep for joy, because I know I soon shall see the day when Cynthia is her old, dear self again.

ALENE.

XII

DEAREST ALENE:

I have had the grandest adventure—just the sort of thing you read about and then say: "All most entertaining, no doubt, but so impossible." I shall never say that again about anything I read. Impossible is a word that ought to be pretty sparingly used, anyhow. Haven't you seen combinations of color in a picture and heard people telling how ridiculously unnatural it was when all the time you could remember the day, the hour, and the spot when you had seen just that same effect exactly? After all, there's nothing more unnatural than nature.

Now I'm not going to try to tell you all the details, for I simply couldn't write them. If you want to know all about it you must come and visit me in August, and I can assure you it will be worth the trouble. Of course Mr. Kenton is involved in it. You've guessed that already, I'm very sure. Well, and this is about all I'm going to write on this subject: Last night Mr. Kenton and I captured two burglars —that is, Mr. Kenton captured one of them and he and I together got the other. The burglar

who fell a victim to our combined efforts we caught on the veranda-roof outside my room, and the first he knew that he was in danger was when I levelled Mr. Kenton's pistol at him from my window with the customary "Hands up!" They went up, too.

Of course we turned them loose (you can imagine all the fuss the papers would have made over it), and not a soul knew about it but Mr. Kenton and me, and, I suspect, Miss Caroline. We didn't make any agreement about keeping it a secret. That's one thing (and there are one or two others) that I like about Mr. Kenton. You don't have to put everything into words. He understands you before you speak. Sometimes, when you're discussing something, you'll only have got out part of a sentence when he sees the end of it, and with a flash of his eye he tells you so, and you stop while he answers just as if you had completed the sentence as you had planned it. Now, I know that people who interrupt you are generally impossible, but you like interruptions like Mr. Kenton's because they really aren't interruptions at all. They make conversation positively telegraphic, and, in fact, talking with Mr. Kenton is the nearest thing to telepathy that I know of. You don't really converse, you think together.

We were sitting on the veranda after breakfast this morning when Watkins (that's the coachman) came around from the stables and told Miss Caroline that he'd found a ladder left against the veranda roof. It had been taken from behind the stables, he said, and he thought it looked queer.

"Didn't McTanner leave it there?" asked Miss Caroline. (McTanner's the gardener.) "I told him to train the woodbine farther up." Watkins said that McTanner denied all knowledge of the misplaced ladder.

"Well, it certainly looks—" began Miss Caroline.

"Ahem!" said Mr. Kenton, under his hand. So Miss Caroline said no more, and I think Mr. Kenton told her all about it later in the day.

I hope I've said enough to whet your curiosity. If I haven't, you're a hopelessly prosaic case; but I beg to assure you that it's quite a grisly tale, full of darkness, assaults, gags, handcuffs, stealthy treads, whispered plots, evil faces, stern commands, cocked revolvers, and even, I think, a little bloodshed. And, don't forget, it's all a dead secret, and if you tell what little you know I never will tell you the rest. So there!

Poor mamma is worried about her wayward

daughter. She came to me yesterday with a letter from Aunt Clara, in which the dear soul grew quite plaintive over her ill-health, and expressed the utmost regret that we were not with her to cheer her up. I never read anything less like Aunt Clara in my life, and yet she wrote it undoubtedly. The poor old soul was never heard to utter a word of complaint about anything in the world, much less about herself, but when mamma steps up she's clay in the hands of the potter. You remember how mamma made her give that house-party last winter? Shall you ever forget that inharmonious assemblage? Poor old lady! so content with her tea and embroidery and her summer home for East Side children—to fill her stately old house with people like the Buffintons and Sharplees and—yes—like Reggie. Mamma can be quite heartless on my account, and that nightmare of a house-party was part of her matrimonial campaign for me.

The fact is that Aunt Clara is not in ill-health at all, and I firmly believe that she's at least as happy when mamma is out of her house as when she's in it. Moreover, I remember seeing upon mamma's writing-desk a few days ago an envelope addressed to that sweet old person. Two and two are said to be four.

Poor mamma underestimates my intelligence. Of course, she more than makes up for this by reading into me a lot of qualities that I don't possess, but for purposes of management her error of judgment is a fatal one. Mamma is too diplomatic. She's always got to have some kind of a petty intrigue going on. Her latest is a plot to get me away from Miss Caroline's before the end of the three weeks for which we were invited. She would never in the world have come had she known that Mr. Kenton was to be here. She doesn't like him; sometimes I think she's afraid of him—not personally, but on my account. And yet she has never addressed one word to me regarding Mr. Kenton. Does it look as if she were afraid to?

When she showed me Aunt Clara's letter all this passed through my mind in an instant.

"Don't you want to finish our visit with Miss Caroline?" I demanded.

"My dear, it isn't that at all," she answered.

"Oh, isn't it?" I asked, innocently.

"Certainly not," replied transparent mamma. "Miss Caroline is most delightful and all that, but don't you think our duty lies with your Aunt Clara?"

"Do you?" said I, shortly.

"I fear it does," she sighed.

"Why do you wish to leave Miss Caroline's?" I demanded abruptly, for I was sick of evasion. "Why aren't you frank with me, mamma?" Really, I did for an instant yearn for candor, and yet I knew that if I got it, it would precipitate I knew not what—so well did I read her mind. So that it was with a curious blending of uneasiness and relief that I heard her reply.

"Why, my dear Cynthia, didn't you read your aunt's letter?"

"Oh, well," I said, "of course if you think you ought to go I suppose you must. I can follow you when my visit is over."

Now it is perfectly certain that wild horses would not drag mamma away without me. But she merely said:

"Very well. I'll consider the matter."

Aunt Clara is, as I said, clay in the hands of the potter; but I mean to arrive before the clay is dry, and I have written saying that if she really needs me I will come at once, but that, if she doesn't, I have a particular reason for wishing to remain here longer. This particular reason is merely to avoid the purchase of any gold bricks from my strategic mamma. We shall see what we shall see.

Mamma came into the room just this moment to get a fan. As she was about to go out she

stopped, came over to me, and put her hand on my head. I looked up at her, but she didn't say anything—just looked troubled, turned away, and went out. If she had stayed a moment longer I believe I should have put my head on her shoulder and wept. Poor, dear mamma! with all her love for me and mine for her, what is it keeps us from each other's hearts?

And yet well do I know that some day there must come a storm. If I am postponing from day to day the inevitable it is more for her sake than for mine, for it will hurt her most. Indeed, the only thing about it that will hurt me will be the knowledge that I am causing her pain.

Yes, dear Alene, I have known for some days and you must have guessed it, too, that I shall never marry Reggie. If you knew what delight it gives me to put those words into form! Why, they seem to sing themselves in my ear. I could even dance to them. I—shall—never—marry—Reggie!

Can't you imagine waltzing to those words? If I had a piano near I could play that waltz this very moment. Alene, dear, it is amazing the joy that floods my spirit. I had no idea it would be so delightful. Not until I had put my decision into words for your benefit did I appre-

ciate what it was from which I was escaping. Now that I realize it I don't know which is the more stupendous—the joy at my escape or the horror of that from which I flee.

For the first time I realize in all its grimness the fact that I have been a prisoner for the last five months—a passive, unresisting prisoner, to be sure, whose bonds have been silken and whose jailers obliging, but a prisoner none the less, the luxury of whose cell could not obliterate the fact that she was about to enter upon a life sentence. Heavens! Positively I shudder to think of it. Actually, my dear Alene, nothing can persuade me that any prisoner set free from the Bastile ever felt more frantic delight over his freedom than I over mine.

Free! I am free! Think of it!

> "If I have freedom in my love
> And in my soul am free!"

What wonderful poet wrote that? I can't think. No matter. The line stings through my brain just now.

And have you wondered all these months, O faithful one, just what my state of mind might be? Has it puzzled you to see your Cynthia so apparently content—so complaisant in a slavery that must have seemed to you so hateful? As I sit here and bring to mind just what you are—

so keen—so subtle—so unfailing in your intuitions—so inevitable in your logic—so wide, so deep in your friendly comprehension—I wonder that you could have preserved the marvellous patience with which you have treated your passive, languid Cynthia through it all. Did you despair of her entirely? No, I cannot think you did, else you would have certainly abandoned her to her fate, with possibly just a gentle thought of what she was or what you thought she was in earlier and better days. It may be that my fancy is too vivid, but I cannot help likening you to the faithful, skilful nurse who, at the climax of a fever, sits with quiet, eager eyes fixed upon her wasted patient—waiting—waiting for the last expiring sigh or the deep and welcome breath which shall tell her that the sleep of convalescence is begun.

I know it will not hurt you if I refer to your dear one—lost to you until journeys end in lovers' meeting. I do it because it calls to mind the only time in all these months that a single hint of all that I now see must have been passing through your brain, fell from your lips. I wonder if you will remember it? It was the day I told you of my engagement. You heard me, and then you took my hands and kissed me, and you said:

"I hope you will be as happy as I was once?"

Do you note the interrogation mark? It passed me by at the time, but it comes back to me now with a soft insistence, like a strain of music which one has heard unthinking, and which awakes one day, long after, in one's memory.

* * * * * *

Your dear letter came to me just now, and I have read it over from beginning to end three separate times. I've been two hours about it, for somehow it set me dreaming of those old childish days of ours as nothing has done before. Every paragraph stirred my memory and touched my heart. I'm not ashamed to say that I wept—quietly and lovingly over the dear times and things that you have called to mind, and sighed, too, for the old courage and candor that seem somehow to have unaccountably forsaken me, and yet, though I mourn for them, I cannot think their loss so very strange. It almost seems as if it were the natural course of events. Where among our intimates shall we look for these lost attributes? Have they not all bowed the knee to Mammon, and don't most of them appear to be having a good time bowing? And consider the sad fate of those girls who have dared to defy society's laws by marrying out of society's bounds. They've been

held up to us as awful examples—as bogeymen who, we have been assured, will certainly "get us if we don't watch out." They've gone their way—the places that knew them—and especially the people—know them no more. You never see them at smart houses, their names seldom appear in the society columns of the newspapers, save as "among those present" at some semi-public affair. Their names have been expurgated from the lists of the elect. They may elope, forge, sicken, die or hang—society cares not. For society they do not exist any more, for they have wilfully gone their way, and it is not the way of society. Poor things! Pardon these tears!

Worst of all, many of these unfortunate women appear to be so hardened in their evil ways as not to appreciate the depths to which they have sunk. Their misdeeds have so calloused their consciences and so dulled their once fine sensibilities that they are frequently sufficiently abandoned to take open pleasure in their unhallowed way of life. This moral blindness is truly the most unhappy feature of the case.

Take Susie Gilson, for example. You know what an attractive girl she was and how much courted and sought after. Why, she might have married Ned Covington, whose great-grand-

ther sold mink skins which he caught in his
n traps in the Canadian woods. Instead she
arried a second-rate artist whose grandfather
as a New England farmer, who worked with his
nds. You can readily see what a heinous of-
ace this error of judgment constituted. Susie
served her doom. I met her on the avenue
e day not long before we left town. De-
essed, disappointed, downcast, of course, you
y. Not a bit of it. She had the effrontery to
te that she was happy and, what's worse, to
ok it. Told me she and her husband were liv-
g in a little suburb up in Westchester, and in-
ed me to come and lunch with her some day.
riosity impelled me and I went. They live in a
ny little gambrel-roofed house on the south-
slope of a hill. It's a little love of a place, all
wers, and smiles and sunshine. Oh, I believe
re is a baby, too, though that, like the blos-
ns of spring, has nothing to do with the case.
t the disheartening feature of the whole thing
that the shameless creature was undoubtedly
liantly, disgustingly happy and hadn't even
decency to conceal it. I was much dispirited
en I came away. What's the use of society
ing such pains to visit summary chastisement
the miserable law-breakers when the wretches
n't seem to know when they're punished?

Worst of all, Susie's second-rate artist is getting to be a first-rate one. And she might have married the trapper's great-grandson!

I mean to go and see Susie again when we get back to town in the Fall. In the interests of science I intend to do it. I can't believe that any girl who was once so nice can long remain so lost to all sense of decorum as to continue happy under such degrading circumstances. Mamma will object, I know, but I shall explain to her that it is purely a scientific inquiry that I am conducting. In the meantime I shall read up my psychology and possibly my medicine. I shall feel easier if I can persuade myself that Susie's astonishingly graceless behavior may be ascribed to pathologic causes.

Then there's the melancholy case of Anne Hutchins. Anne's father was a telegraph operator who got into the railroad business at the right time and made millions at it while Anne was a child. Anne refused Charley Wetzler, whose favorite uncle annually makes soap enough to cleanse the sins of Abraham's seed and Lady Macbeth's little hand, and married a young lawyer whose people have been merchants in Plymouth since the arrival of the Mayflower on her second voyage to our "stern and rock-bound coast." Most of the rocks seem un-

accountably to have disappeared, but anyway that finished Anne. Young lawyers don't own steam yachts and Newport "cottages," nor automobiles, nor fast horses, nor polo ponies nor opera-boxes nor palaces on the Avenue. Anne's mother, who was a waitress in a Pittsburg restaurant when Hutchins married her and has forgotten all about it, did herself credit by her stern opposition to this glaring mésalliance. In fact, she told her daughter with admirable frankness that it was a case of the railroads versus the lawyer. (Curious thing—they're usually on the same side.) Anne can't say she wasn't warned, but she wilfully flouted society, the railroads and the soap youth, turned her back on all that these things meant, and departed with her lawyer. Poor old Hutchins was dead when his unhappy daughter thus disgraced his name and consigned herself to outer darkness. Lucky man! Or do you suppose he would have remembered the restaurant? Perish the awful thought!

And what do you suppose Anne had the temerity to advance as her excuse? Why, the girl stoutly maintained that she loved her lawyer man! Yes, child, that's every living reason she could give for her brazen disregard of the commandments of society. She made no secret of it whatever. Not that she boasted of it. But

everybody knew it. Somehow the impression had gained general circulation—you know how bad news travels. And she made no effort at all to contradict it—not the smallest effort in the world, I do assure you.

I suppose it cannot be successfully denied that occasionally two people in society do fall in love and marry for that reason and remain in that state for some time thereafter. But certainly these offenders have the self-respect not to flaunt the truth in everybody's faces. They have a decent regard for the feelings of their relatives and friends. The skeleton is, at all events, kept quiet in its closet.

Well, dear, if I needed any encouragement to follow the stormy course I have marked out for myself, you have given it to me. There will be trouble, that I know, but now that I have made up my mind to it, it seems imperative that I should have it over as soon as possible. Of course, the tooth generally stops aching when you get to the dentist's door, but I have made up my mind to have the dentist come to me.

I don't know that I ever mentioned papa to you in the course of this affair. If I've been passive through it all, and Heaven knows my cheeks burn to think how meek I have been, papa has been even more quiescent. If the

match-making papa were only half as numerous as the match-making mamma, there would be more matches made in heaven.

I remember the exact words papa used when he learned how matters stood. He looked at me a little wistfully and then he said: "I'm pleased if you are, little girl. God knows I only want you to be happy."

Poor papa! How little he understood of what had been going on under his very nose. Poor man! To stand ignorant and uncertain in his own house while they juggled with Cynthia's everlasting future! Many a time have I caught him looking uneasily at me, only to see him awkwardly try to hide his doubts under a smile and an embarrassed caress. I wonder what he was thinking of? Once or twice, when we were by ourselves, he drew me upon his knees and, taking my hands in his big, strong, clumsy ones, he smiled and asked me if I were happy. And I always answered with a kiss.

Well, the days of papa's doubts are over. I shall ask Miss Caroline to ask him down over Sunday. Then I shall write him such a letter as will bring him to a certainty. Dear old dad! He would go to the world's end for me if I wrote him as I mean to do, and if the last train had gone he'd charter a special. And when he

comes he shall have the rights that have so l and so unjustly been denied him. He shall le the heart of Cynthia as he never has known since she was a little girl. And then—well, cannot tell you the serenity that I know w come to me when he knows everything. E never failed me yet; I know he will not fail m now. And yet I feel a little in awe of him. I is so long since he and I were chums.

I have written in this very letter that my only sensation was one of indescribably intense relief at my new-found freedom. It was true when I wrote it, but now that I have read your precious letter that sensation has given place to shame that I could ever so have humiliated myself. Can you ever forgive me, I wonder? Can you ever give me quite the same old place in your warm, white heart that I held before I did this dreadful thing? Do not fear that I shall ever again forget. Your great kindness brings the tears to my eyes. I'm not worthy—no, nor ever was, of what you say of me. It almost makes me sorry for you that you should take my pitiable failure so much to heart, and that is why the prisoner at the bar is going to say what little she can in her defence before you pronounce sentence upon her. Be merciful to me, oh! dearest of judges.

It isn't much that I can offer in palliation. It's only to say that for a reason that I can't explain—not now, at least—life seemed to have lost its savor—something that I had begun to long for and to hope for with all my being—was suddenly withdrawn from the number of possible things—at least I was convinced it had been. After that, it didn't seem to matter much to me what I did. No change, I was convinced, could be for the worse. Why shouldn't I do the usual thing—so many others had done it and were doing it all around me. It was easy enough to fall in line. It's all an empty business, thought I, but I'll just mingle with the madding throng who are jostling one another and smiling and wielding their slap-sticks and pretending that they are getting something worth while out of it. Maybe the noise will help me to forget. I wonder if the rest of these antic-makers have anything to forget?

So I dashed madly into the mob and laughed and flourished my tambourine and cried "Houp-la!" with the rest. But I didn't forget, I only got out of breath. Yet, once in, it was no easy thing to find my way out. Besides, I kept hoping to be amused. Everybody else seemed to be having a good time. I wondered a little at this until I watched them more closely. Then I saw

that when they forgot to smile and wield t
slap-sticks they looked very tired indeed.

But something has happened—no, not
has happened—yes, everything has happe
to change all that. The embers of the fir
hope, long deemed dead, have begun to
again. If I could only tell you, dearest A
but I can't—I can't—I dare not even tell m
as yet—but somehow the tide of life—not
miserable, crawling, sluggard thing that goe
that name—but life—life itself—bounding,
rious, full-blooded life—is filling my veins
more with the old, sweet, ecstatic tingle.
afraid to welcome it—afraid almost to reco
it lest, closing my eyes in confidence some n
I awake in the morning to find it gone.
there it is. How well I remember it, a
thought I had forgotten! And now I know
I could never forget it, and, dear heart, r
will I try again, even should I know that it
never come back.

But—but—I falter as I turn to meet it.
it be possible that it will return to me—t
who have so despitefully entreated it? Can
possible it will knock once more upon that
so blindly shut in its face? It seems too
to hope for. And yet—and yet—afar in
dim and outer corridors of my heart, I

to hear the echoes of those old familiar footsteps. Slowly, uncertainly, doubtfully, they draw nearer—and nearer—and nearer. They have passed the hall of forgetfulness—through the chamber of despair they come—now the corridor of doubt is left behind—on the threshold of the hall of hope they pause. Shall I hear them soon outside the door of certainty and that old, beloved, resonant voice crying:

"Behold—behold, I wait for you. Open, for I am Life."

Dear Alene, you have made the shadows real again; you have called them back from the land of childish dreams—poor dear dreams—how could I so neglect them? and they so beautiful. But they're back now. Yes, you've called back the nursery days—the rain on the window—the tears on Cousin Kate's face—and Lady Jane Grey and Phyllis de Montmorency Fitzgibbon and dear one-legged Augustus Charles Clarence de Courcey, too—yes, they're all real again—all of them—far more real than the gay, hard-working people with the slap-sticks, God help them!

Good night, dearest Alene. Why should I strive to tell you all that I mean and feel—you, who can so read the heart of

CYNTHIA.

XIII

WELL, old chap, she knows it all now—all that's in my heart for her. Did I say "all"? That's the height of nonsense, for I never could tell her that—not if I had the tongues of angels and eternity in which to use them. There may not be such a great deal there, but it's all I am or hope to be, and God knows I hope it's enough. Yet it couldn't be that, either—not for Cynthia—and yet, pray Heaven, she'll think so. I never thought to try to deceive Cynthia, but it has ever come to that, for I am hoping against hope that some kind fairy may blind her wondrous eyes to my littleness and keep her from ever finding out how unworthy I am to loose the latchets of her little shoes.

Yes, I've spoken to her—I've tried to tell her and to show her what she is to me, and yet I haven't stepped over the line which I laid down as my boundary. I haven't crossed it in word or deed. Nor has she bidden me to cross it, and yet of course she knows—she knows—she must know. I determined from the first that she should know, and know she does—I can do no

more—can go no further. I can only wait and watch. My last step has been taken, and this is how it happened:

Reggie went off to town this morning, grumbling and growling, cursing his brokers and the day that he invested in C. T. & O. Polly and I stood on the porch and viewed his profane departure. Polly looked at me as the trap disappeared over the hill.

"Well," she demanded, slyly, "what's your programme for the day?"

"It all depends," said I, and added: "Polly, I don't believe I should have consented, had I been sure of your plans." She eyed me saucily.

"All men are liars," she quoted.

"Do you doubt me?" I inquired. She nodded violently. "'Tis sad," said I, "to be misunderstood," and I managed a sigh.

"You needn't worry about that," said she. "You're well enough understood, by Reggie, at least. His attachment to you is evidence of that. Nor have *I* any illusions about you. As for Cynthia, well—if she doesn't understand you, whose fault is it?"

"Polly," said I, "are you aware to what you counsel me? Miss Fenwick is engaged."

"Well," returned my ally, "she's a long way from being married."

"I hope so," I answered. "I mean, I'm afraid so—ah! I don't know what I mean."

"You mean precisely what you said," retorted Polly. "You hope so and you're afraid so. Let it go at that. What?"

"Miss Cheatham," said I, "your skill at analysis is no less remarkable than are your powers of observation. Can I say more?"

"'Nuff said," quoth she, cheerfully; "and I hope to dance at your——"

"Ahem!" I interrupted, for at that moment Cynthia issued from the doorway, dressed for walking. Don't ask me what she wore, for I couldn't tell you, save that it was all of a sea-blue, even to a pair of stockings, of which I caught a delectable flash beneath the hem of her short skirt. Polly incontinently deserted, giving, as she went, the hail of Mowgli:

"Good hunting!"

"Thanks," said Cynthia and I in one breath. Then we both laughed.

"Oh," murmured Cynthia, "I thought she was speaking to me. Are you going hunting? I didn't know you could shoot at this season of the year."

"Mm—no," I answered; "I'm not going hunting—not exactly—and yet maybe I am. Are you?" She shook her bronze-gold head.

"I'm going thinking," she said.

"I am something of a thinker myself," I ventured.

"No," she answered, "I can't have you along. You'd be in the way."

"Absit omen!" I exclaimed, piously crossing myself.

Cynthia stood in the sunshine, reflecting, eyes on the ground. I waited. At last she looked up with an air of decision.

"No," she smiled, "I've decided. You can't come. You'd interrupt my train of thought."

"I should like to rob it," I answered. She looked at me with those inscrutable violet eyes. Then she flashed that wonderful smile (it's a gift o' Heaven, that smile), and turned on her heel so suddenly that her blue-stockinged angles twinkled momentarily where the sunlight kissed them.

"Good-by," she murmured, and was off. In an instant she turned, and

"Oh! by the way," she said, "is the laurel trail in a walkable condition? I haven't been over it this year."

"It was, yesterday morning," said I.

I watched her down the soft, green lawn and through the big stone arch.

From somewhere inside the great house came the voice of Polly, singing distantly:

"O who would stand on 'If I might'
Or wait on 'If I could,'
When roses scent the summer air
And beauty walks the wood?"

"Who, indeed, but an ass like me?" thought I as I walked dejectedly toward the stables.

But you can't ride over the laurel trail. It's narrow and crooked and overgrown with a tangle of weeds and briars, while from either side the woods reach out their arms, not stiffly nor with menace, but gently as if to caress you. As you walk you must occasionally stoop in order to make your way. So Gunfire stayed in the stable. At this season of the year the glory of the laurel has not yet passed, and as I followed the trail I breathed an air that was heavy with the perfume of the pink blossoms that grew on either bank and tempted me to pluck them.

So easily had she made her fragrant way along that at first I found no trace and thought to myself with a frown how cleverly she had sent me on a fool's errand. But at last, in an open space, I came upon the print of a small heel in the earth. It was amazing how my spirits rose. Whistling confidentially to myself I pursued my way through the tangle of pink perfume. Once, upon a friendly briar that stretched out its sharp fingers across the narrow

path, I descried a fragment of something white and filmy. All torn and shredded it was and is. I will give you anything else you ask.

So I came to the wood-road that leads from the post-road up through the second growth, along the high and winding shore of Deep Pond, where the wood-duck come first in the Autumn. Once I stumbled upon a hen partridge with her little brood of chicks. How they scattered in every direction with feeble half-baked flights, half running, half flying and chirping their panic from quivering throats, while their mother fluttered along before me, craftily dragging one wing in the dust as if it had been broken.

Thus I came at length to Quacompaug, known to the townspeople as "School-house Pawnd." Quacompaug is an Indian name—this whole country here used to be an Indian reservation for the Niantics—and it means Lake of the Great White Gull. The countryside is laced with old Indian trails worn by the feet of warriors whose bones long since have fertilized the soil. In some sandy places after a heavy rain you can still pick up an occasional arrow-head, while the nomenclature of the township is saturated with the history of the Red Man.

I doubt if such complete isolation is to be found elsewhere so near the haunts of urban

civilization. Quacompaug is a picturesque sheet of crystal-clear water, fed largely by springs and about a mile long and a half a mile wide at its greatest width. Its shores, gracefully undulating, are covered with a growth of timber, which, while not primeval, has not felt the axe for a score of years or more. A good deal of it is pine, much of it is oak, and most of it is bearded with long tendrils of gray-green moss, which give it a distinctly tropical appearance, which I attribute, wrongly or rightly, to the proximity of the sea. The nearest farm-house is a mile away, and the only approaches are wood-roads and trails, seldom used and half overgrown with the woodsy accumulation of years of neglect and abandonment. It is rarely indeed, as you roam this country, that you meet a fellow-wanderer, and, when you do, he is generally a native of the country bent on some fishing or shooting enterprise.

Game there is in plenty. The laws of the State protect deer at all times, and it is not at all uncommon to come suddenly upon a startled doe with a fragile fawn at her heels, who stare at you an instant before they go crashing through the brush. Now and then a brown rabbit hops across your path, and you can hear him expressing his distrust of you by stamping his absurd

hind feet in the undergrowth. More rarely, as you round a sharp curve of the wood-road, you will come face to face with Brer Fox, who silently turns his back, slips into the cover, and goes padding noiselessly on his crafty way. In the Fall, if you listen for it, you may, without leaving the trail, hear the cock partridge drumming on some hollow log afar in the wood. A dull and muffled sound it is, with surprising carrying power. Slowly, deliberately, it begins and continues, with quickening speed, until the strokes follow one another so rapidly that they sound like the roll of a snare-drum in some vast and empty chamber. Streaks of brilliant blue flash across your path continually. They are Mr. Blue-jay. The brown thrush flits from bush to bush just ahead of you, stopping to look back, and then moving on a stage, as if to warn the other forest-folk of your approach. Now and then through the dusky shades you can see a small shape dimly flitting. Then you hear a rat-a-tat-tat, and you know it is the crested wood-pecker. Once on a time, in some little meadow, there's a whir-r-r under your very feet, and a bird with a grotesque beak disappears fitfully into the wood with a flight like that of a drunken kite. And that is the 'possum of bird-land, Mr. Woodcock.

Quacompaug and Deep Pond are separated only by a narrow little ridge of land, and connected by a tiny brook scarce one long stride in width. From the wood-road down along the ridge to the stream runs a narrow trail, that, to the unaccustomed eye, has no existence, so heavily is it overgrown. Through this I slowly found my way until halted by a familiar sound. It was the unmistakable chuckle of a gray squirrel. These nimble chaps are not common hereabouts, for nut-trees are scarce. However, there was no mistaking a voice I had learned to know so well in the highlands of Massachusetts. I stopped to listen. Presently I heard him again —still chuckling garrulously to himself and evidently in high good-humor. He's a noisy chap —is your gray squirrel. If he could only hold his tongue there would be more of him.

Cautiously I felt my way along, stepping on stones or moss and avoiding dry twigs until I heard the babble of the brook. Another step or two and the underbrush grew thinner. I found an opening for my head, and peered through. Then I saw a curious sight.

On the other side of the brook, hard by its brim, Cynthia was kneeling in the moss. Through a rift in the foliage sifted a single sunbeam. It fell upon her hair, and made a glim-

mering glory of it. Her sleeves were rolled up to her dimpled elbows, and one white arm was outstretched. Upon a small flat rock just beyond her reach sat Mr. Squirrel, poised upon his hind legs, his fore-paws depending like those of a begging dog, his furry tail curved up until it brushed his tiny ears, chuckling at the top of his voice. After a moment he stopped. Then an odd, soft, guttural murmur came to my ears, and I saw that Cynthia's scarlet lips were parted. Yes, there could be no mistake—she was addressing a few remarks to Mr. Gray-tail. It was a curious sound, more like the mating coo of a domestic dove than anything else I ever heard—yet more diversified than that. Pretty soon Mr. Gray-tail chuckled again. Then Cynthia cooed back at him, still stretching out her hand. It ended in Mr. Gray-tail's scrambling casually up and helping himself to something white from Cynthia's hand. Then he sat up and munched it, and the fragments of peanut-shells fell at his feet.

A twig snapped sharply under my heel. Instantly Mr. Gray-tail took alarm and scurried swiftly to a hickory-tree nearby, up which he scrambled in a jiffy, and sat snarling at a dizzy height near his nest of leaves. He simply bristled with suspicion. Cynthia brushed her finger-

tips together and her eyes searched the wood. In a moment they fell on me.

"Discovered!" she cried, gently.

I stepped into the open.

"You've frightened my little friend," she accused me, across the brook.

"What language were you speaking to him?" I demanded, sitting down with my back to a white birch.

"Eavesdropping, were you? How long were you watching us?"

"Only a few moments," I assured her. "I heard your friend chuckle, and, as I was not previously aware of his existence, I thought I'd try to get a look at him. Believe me, had I had the least notion you were having a *tête-à-tête* I would have died before intruding."

"Two's company," said Cynthia, gazing regretfully up into the hickory.

"Well," said I, "I'm here."

"Three's none," said Cynthia.

"Consider," I replied, "that Mr. Gray-tail has departed."

"He has," said Cynthia, severely, "a disposition whose delicacy is quite as refreshing as it is rare."

"Humph!" said I; "I call it cowardice—abandoning the field at the mere approach of a rival."

"If it comes to that," began Cynthia, maliciously, and stopped, looking for all the world as if she hadn't said a word. I begged permission to light a cigarette. I had to do something—or squirm.

"At first," she said, after a pause, "he wouldn't come any farther than the foot of his tree, where I scattered peanuts for him. Then I laid a trail of them all the way over here, and at last—well, you saw what good friends we are."

"I'm sorry to have to undeceive you," said I, firmly. "He doesn't care a peanut for you."

"Oh! you can't make trouble between us," she retorted, with a toss of her head.

"He doesn't care a peanut for you," I repeated, heartlessly. "It's just his beastly appetite. He's only after what he can get out of you."

"So?" said Cynthia. "Suppose *you* try to coax him down, then."

"Obliged to decline," said I, "with thanks. I don't know his language. However, you've one consolation—he'll die of indigestion."

"Well, at any rate," she answered, obstinately, "you can't deny he has some confidence in me."

"True enough," said I, perversely; "the peanuts might be drugged, for all he knows."

"I don't think it's at all nice of you to come

out here and try to poison my mind against a friend who never did anything to you," she pouted.

"All's fair in love and war," said I, calmly.

"But," she complained, naïvely, "we're not at war." There was a pause.

"No," said I, "we're not." There was a longer pause.

Mr. Gray-tail, from his tree-top, squalled like a cross baby.

"You see," said Cynthia, "he's got his opinion of you, too."

"May I ask you to interpret his remarks?" I said, politely.

"I'm afraid you wouldn't be pleased," she answered, with an oblique glance under her lashes. Mr. Gray-tail squalled again.

"I admit," I replied, "that the gentleman's tones have a critical accent, but isn't it fair that I should know the accusations made against me? Surely you wouldn't condemn a man unheard?"

"He says," said Cynthia, with her eyes on the moss, "that I ought to beware of you."

"Humph!" I growled. "I don't come after peanuts, at all events. Just tell him that, will you?"

"He says," said Cynthia, "that that's no argu-

ment, since it's notorious that you don't like peanuts."

"Pshaw!" said I, angrily, "that's a mere quibble—a mere——"

"He adds," she interrupted, "since you've brought up the subject of peanuts, that he doesn't care for them especially himself, and much prefers walnuts, of which he's got a hoard buried under the roots of his tree. He declares that his willingness to eat my peanuts is merely another proof of his unselfish devotion to me."

"Give me some peanuts, please," I humbly entreated.

"Wretched man!" she cried, "you know very well that Mr. Gray-tail has eaten them all."

"Ha!" said I, melodramatically. "Ha! Of course he has! and why, think you? Why, but to deprive me of the opportunity of demonstrating the disinterestedness of my regard? A thousand curses on the villain!" and I cast an evil glance at the top of the hickory-tree. At the sound of my invective Mr. Gray-tail squalled back his defiance.

"Order in the court-room!" said Cynthia, sternly. "This isn't a theatre, Mr. Kenton."

"I will have justice, though," said I, sullenly. "By the bones of my ancestors, I swear it!"

"You needn't shout about it," she said. "Justice isn't deaf, though she may be blind."

"Justice and Cupid ought to consult an oculist," I growled. "One goes around flourishing a two-edged sword and the other wanders about with a bow and arrow taking pot shots on spec. And neither of 'em can see a yard. Hasn't the public any rights at all?"

"You speak with conviction," said Cynthia, plucking a handful of moss.

"I should think so," I grumbled. "That fellow with the bow and arrow punctured me nicely. And, what's worse, it was the close season. If they can't take his weapons away from him they might at least make him respect the game-laws. Yet here I am, done for, down and out, all on account of this blind archery." I sighed mournfully.

"Oh! it isn't as bad as that," laughed Cynthia. "Surely, you'll recover."

"Never," I said, firmly.

"But have you tried?"

"Tried! I should think so."

"Aren't you any better than you were?"

"Worse—much worse!"

"Have you consulted a physician?"

"Of course not."

"Why 'of course'?"

"Didn't I tell you that this was the close season! If you're spitted in the close season, it's one of the rules of the game that you must do everything you can—and some things that you can't—to prevent people from finding it out—go hunt a hole somewhere and die quietly. At any rate, keep it dark."

"Is that why you're telling me about it?"

I glanced up at her quickly, but she was tossing pebbles into the brook.

"Well, no," I answered, reflectively, "that isn't why I'm telling you. If you want to know——"

"I *don't* want to know," she interrupted, hurriedly. "But it appears to me that in telling me you have violated the rules of the game."

"Well," said I, with a touch of defiance, "suppose I have?"

"That's what I want to know. What happens when you violate the rules of the game?"

"I give it up. You see, I never did it before. But I know you won't tell anybody."

"Oh! You do? How do you know that?"

"Well, if it comes to that, I don't know that I do. Go and tell, if you like, but I advise you not."

"Oho! a threat!"

"Oh, no! Good grief, no! Call it a request, an' it please you. Threat! Great Scott!"

She laughed—that tinkling laugh of hers—and the brook laughed back.

"Well, what are you going to do about it?" she said.

"Eh?"

"Going to hunt a hole somewhere and die quietly?"

"I am so young to die!" I murmured, but she answered:

" 'Men have died and worms have eaten them —but not for love.' "

"The early worm gets the lover," I replied; "but you don't believe what you said."

"No," said Cynthia, gravely, and her voice fell to a murmur. "No, truly I don't."

"For," said I, leaning forward, "they do die for love. You and I know scores of them who have died for it. Their obituary notices have not yet been published; they still move and breathe and dance and work and play and sing, but they're dead, for all that—yes, dead as Cæsar—yes, a great deal deader than that, for, despite Mr. Antony's remarks on the subject, the best part of Cæsar (not meaning his soul, by a long shot) lives after him, and will live as long as the round world spins. Dead? I should think they were dead!"

"And are you going to die thus, too?" asked Cynthia, very quietly. I dared not look at her.

"God knows," said I. "I cannot help myself." I rose and stood with my hands clasped behind me, leaning against the birch.

"I cannot tell her how the glance of her eyes, the touch of her finger-tips, the sound of her voice, yes, even the rustle of her skirts in a darkened corridor, thrills me and fills me with delight that is almost pain—how all days without her are gray and tedious—how every hour is brilliant when she is near—how a life without her confronts me like a blank, black wall, against which I must lean, through useless years, with my face buried in my hands—idle, listless, empty, till the kindly end of all things overtakes me. Yes, I die for her, and yet I cannot even tell her so."

All silent and grave she sat there across the brook, while little patches of sunlight flickered here and there through the green and whispering lattice over her head. The brook rippled musically over the stones. A stray bee hummed through the shade. A catbird gave his strident call in the tangle. The scent of the laurel sweetened all the air about us. The universe stood still.

Mr. Gray-tail awoke the echoes with a sudden squall. Cynthia smiled.

"Don't believe him, I pray you," said I, hastily. Cynthia arose—she seemed to grow from the moss at her little feet.

"By-the-by," she said, "I thought I told you not to come?"

"Have mercy," I implored. "I tried hard to stay away, indeed I did. If you only knew how hard I tried—but I couldn't help it."

"It's partly my fault," she reflected. "I shouldn't have given you my route, but I thought you would obey me."

"Really?" I demanded. "Did you really think so?"

"Would it please you better if I said I hoped so?" she asked, demurely. To this I had nothing to say, and said it.

"I am sure," she went on, severely, "you will agree that my mother would not at all approve."

"I would swear to that," I assented, promptly.

"And I have tried all my life," she pursued, plaintively, "to regulate my conduct by the standard of her approval."

"It's well," I admitted, "to aim as high as possible. Lofty ideals mean noble lives."

"You talk like a copy-book," said Cynthia.

"Why don't you get some lofty ideals of your own?"

"Very well," said I, cheerfully. "I agree. Suppose I adopt yours? Suppose I strive from this day forth to regulate my conduct by the standard of your mother's approval?"

"Are you prepared for the immediate consequences?"

"Can't promise—I'm only supposing."

"Because they would involve, I am sure, a long and instant journey and an indefinite absence."

"That's odd—one course for me and another for you. Is there no such thing as the absolute in conduct?"

"Not in mamma's sight—it's always relative."

"You discourage me. I'm sure I can never be good—I've been wicked so long. But tell me, do you always realize your own adopted ideals of deportment?"

"Not always, I fear."

"Come, this is better."

"You see, one is occasionally prevented by circumstances beyond one's control."

"For example?"

"For example, one goes off to walk, having decided that one is not to be followed, and then one *is* followed. You can see how that compli-

cates things." I kept my eyes religiously fixed on Mr. Gray-tail's dizzy habitation. "And then one decides that one is to return alone, and——"

"Wonderful how the fine weather lasts," said I, turning to go.

"We're to have an addition to our number at Belleville," said Cynthia, quickly.

"Yes?" said I, with distant politeness.

"We expect papa to-night. You know my father, I believe?"

"I have that pleasure," replied your servant, not at all mollified. "Is he to stay long?" Cynthia waited a moment.

"As long as I need him," she answered, at length. I turned again to go, and then turned back.

"About this standard of conduct business, now," I said. "I should be interested to know whether the ideals of your honored papa coincide at every point with those of your respected mamma?"

"You will have to ask papa," said Cynthia.

Now of all the perfectly maddening replies wasn't that the very maddeningest of all the glad New Year? I stared at her a half minute or so, my heart thumping like a trip-hammer, and my blood pounding most amazingly in my temples. Did it mean anything or didn't it? I would have

given my right hand to know, and yet I dared not ask. And there she stood, in the cool and leafy shade, a Delphic smile upon her crimson, parted lips, dropping confounded pebbles, one by one, from her warm, white fingers into the merry little brook, her wonderful eyes on the bubbles that rose and floated away. It was maddening, old chap, deliriously maddening. Sink me, if it wasn't!

"I will," said I, at length. It was the best I could do. "I leave you to my hated rival in yonder tree-top. Good-morning."

"Morning," answered Cynthia, gayly, as I strolled sulkily away.

A series of gentle "plunks!" came, *diminuendo,* to my ear, as the silly pebbles went on falling into the foolish brook. Mr. Gray-tail squalled again. I stopped. Soon I heard him once more. This time he was chuckling.

Saddened, depressed, humiliated, I pursued my way, humming gently to the sentinel brown-thrush:

> "Oh! who would stand on 'If I might,'
> Or wait on 'If I could'——"

Oh! but she's a wondrous maid! What wonder that I'm gay to-day? Even though I die for her, it will be something to look backward to, even though— But it's inconceivable! It's

impossible! Maid o' Paradise mated to a clod! Fancy cannot paint a thing so monstrous.

Yet there it is! What is there but my vain imaginings to give me hope? Nothing—nothing, alas! nothing! What wonder that I'm so wretched to-day?

So here I am, dear old chap, blindfolded, bound, and gagged, waiting for them to take me out and shoot me. And yet, so fatuous a wight am I that I am by no means yet resigned to my fate. If it comes, I trust that I shall die as becomes one who has always tried to be a gentleman, if not a scholar, and yet my ears are strained to catch the sound of feet that fly to carry my reprieve. Little feet they are, and oh! so light and swift. "How beautiful upon the mountains——"

J. K.

XIV

He's come, dearest Alene, my own dear dad, I mean, and I'm as happy as never was. I dare-say you've thought me a rather self-reliant, somewhat too independent sort of girl, and I've been inclined to hold that opinion of myself at times; I won't deny it. But you cannot fancy what a relief it is to have him here just when I need him so much—I didn't realize how much until he came.

Yes, he's come back to me, has dear dad. He's once more the dear, sympathetic father of childish days, to whom I ran with every little grief and trouble, confident of finding balm for all my girlish woes. How wide apart we drifted. Now that we are together again I cannot understand it any more than I can understand my own passivity all these months.

I don't think mamma was particularly delighted to see him. She's fond of him, of course; but she had a presentiment that his coming had something to do with some deep-laid plot of mine, the exact character of which had not yet appeared. Nobody can deny that mamma is shrewd. However, there was nothing for her to

do but to look pleasant and unsuspicious. She has always seemed uneasy whenever dad and Reggie have been together, though those occasions have been rare, and when they did occur the social intercourse between them has been slight and generally confined on dad's part to an offer of a cigar (Reggie smokes cigarettes) and an invitation to play billiards (which Reggie hates, though he does play with Mr. Kenton). So that mamma did not cheer up to any appreciable extent when Reggie arrived an hour or two after papa. Papa came on the Stonington boat and Reggie by way of the Providence steamer.

"Stocks stronger?" inquired papa, after shaking Reggie's enthusiastic hand (I had told dad why Reggie went to town).

"Give it up," replied Reggie; "my brokers told me that C. T. & O. might go 'way down rapidly or 'way up ditto—couldn't tell which for a day or two. They thought I ought to be on the ground, as I hold a good deal of it. But I ordered 'em to sell at the market, so I don't care a hang which way it goes now."

"It's pleasant to be able to look at things in that way," answered papa; "I can't afford it myself."

"Not really?" said the tactful Reggie. "But

then, it's rather a luxury with me, you know. Shouldn't do it ordinarily, but it—it's deuced hot in town just now. Beastly place in summer, New York."

It wasn't until late in the afternoon that I got a chance to tell papa what was on my mind. Reggie simply adhered to him—clamored for his opinion upon every imaginable subject, wanted to take him out in his automobile, even played billiards with him. He'd have been annexed to him yet if Mr. Kenton hadn't sought my society. Of course that drew Reggie's fire, but just before he reached us I managed to whisper to Mr. Kenton:

"Would you mind entertaining Reggie for a bit?"

"I cannot think of anything that would give me more pleasure," said he, mendaciously.

"I have a use for papa," I added.

So when Reggie came up Mr. Kenton involved him in a discussion as to the exact distance between the house and the post-road. I took Reggie's side of the controversy, and Mr. Kenton promptly offered to back his views with a wager. That caught Reggie. He's always crazy to bet anybody anything on either side of anything. So Mr. Kenton dragged him off to the stables to get a steel tape-measure.

Papa and I went out into the rose-garden and sat in a shady arbor, all covered with fragrant vines and furnished with rustic chairs and benches and things. Papa sat down in the hammock and I drew a chair up in front of him. It was rather awkward. There was such a gap of years between us. I didn't know how to begin. He did it for me.

"Well?" he said, at last. "I got your letter, of course. What is it, Cynthia? You said you needed me. You knew that would fetch me, didn't you?"

"I—I hoped so, dad," said I.

"You knew it would," he answered. "We haven't been as near each other lately as we used to be—I don't know quite why, but I can't think the fault is mine. Isn't it true that you haven't been quite candid with me, my dear girl?"

"Oh, dad," I answered, "if only I had!"

"Tut, tut," he said, reaching out his great strong hand to my frail one. "What's the trouble? No matter what it is, we'll fix it up somehow."

"I—I'm afraid you'll be vexed with me," I answered, "but I can't help it. I've been a long time finding it out, and it's worried me a good deal, but—but the fact is, I—I don't want to

marry Reggie." Dad dropped my hand, stood up, thrust both his own hands into his pockets, and stood looking down at me.

"Are you awfully vexed with me?" I said.

"Vexed?" cried dad, with his quick, warm smile breaking out all over his fine old face. "Vexed! Why, Dot, it's the best news I've had for months!" It was the first time he had called me by my baby name in years. Then he took me in his strong arms and drew me toward him.

"Why, Dot," he said, "did you think I'd be vexed at that?"

"No, dad," I answered, "I really didn't, but —but—well, I wanted you back just as you used to be and—and maybe I—I dissembled just a tiny bit to make you feel sorry for me."

"Good Lord!" said dad, holding me very close. "What a minx you are! Vexed! Why, I'm tickled to pieces. I've never liked the man. I've never thought he was good enough for you. Lord! I've never thought he was good enough to look at my Dot. It was the biggest disappointment in my life. By George! you don't know how relieved I am. You haven't an idea!" He paced up and down, exclaiming to himself in his joy. "By George! Dot!" he concluded, "why the mischief did you ever promise to marry

him?" I had to tell him that that was one of those things no fellow could find out.

"I thought, of course, you were in love with the man. I couldn't see how you could be, but I thought you must be. Long ago I arrived at the conclusion that you never can predict what a woman will do in that way. The things that a woman will love a man for are simply incredible, yes, and undiscoverable, too. Nothing is impossible in that line. But that my Cynthia—well, Dot, it stumped me, it simply did. When did you find out you didn't care for that muff?" This was the moment I had dreaded, but it had to come.

"I never cared for him, dad. I never even thought I cared for him." Dad stared and pulled his mustache.

"Well, well, by George!" he said.

"I never deceived him about it. He knew it all the time, and mamma knew it too. I told her, but she seemed to think that would come later and—and——"

"Well, by George!" said dad again. After a long pause he added:

"But you must have had some reason—I simply can't imagine my Dot——"

"Oh, I love you for that, dad," I cried; "I simply love you for that," and I went to him and

kissed him twice. "I did so hope you would say that. Yes, I had a reason. There was something—that is, someone else——"

"Ah!" said dad, pulling his mustache doubtfully.

"Someone else who—who—didn't care——"

"Eh? What?" said dad, incredulously.

"And—and so I thought it didn't matter, anyhow—don't you see—it didn't make any difference what—what happened—so long as mamma was pleased—and—and—oh, dad, I am so glad I've told you!"

Again he took me in his arms.

"Poor little Dot," he murmured, caressing my hair, "poor little girl—and to think I didn't know. Have you been so very unhappy?"

"Oh, dad!" I sobbed, and

"Poor child! Poor little girl!" said dad. At length I looked up through my tears and said:

"I needn't marry him, need I, dad?"

"Marry him?" cried dad. "Not if you were twenty times engaged. I'll go and tell him so at once," and he took a step toward the door of the arbor.

"No—no," I said, hastily, "let me tell him. It won't be pleasant, but surely he's entitled to that consideration."

"Oh! very well," said dad, "as you like, but I thought—your mother, does she know?"

"No," said I. "I've got to tell her, too. I won't shield myself behind you, but I couldn't do it without telling you first. Poor mamma! it will be a blow to her. She'd set her heart on it so."

"Pshaw!" cried dad. "I never could abide the man. I can never forgive myself or your mother—oh! well, let's not talk of that. I dare-say she meant it for the best, but upon my word —oh! well, I can't talk about it with patience." He sat down and growled to himself. I hugged him for it, and, to that end, I sat upon his knees and put one arm around his neck. At length he said:

"But I don't see yet what made you change your mind about it. It's no worse now than it always was. It was a hideous thing from the start. Yet you go on with it for months and all at once——"

"Oh, dad," I whispered, "don't you see? Don't you, really?"

He held me off at arm's length and looked at me.

"Little girl—little girl," he said at last, in that deep voice of his, "is it really so?" I could not answer him, and he went on.

"And does he——"

"Papa!" said I, in a tone of scandal. "How can you? Do you think I would let him——"

"Eh?" said puzzled papa.

"I am an engaged girl," said I, with dignity. Papa laughed quietly and long.

"By George!" he said, at last. "By George! So you are. But we shall change all that, and if your mother—well, send her to me, that's all; I've been a negligible quantity in my own house too long. Can't you tell me—but of course you can't—I'm an old fool, but I have eyes in my head, I hope, and maybe—" he got up and stood looking at me. A smile began to twinkle in his keen old eyes and spread from them over his rugged features. Then he thrust his hands deep down in his pockets and

"Oh! by George!" he murmured.

After that he was silent for a while. Then he drew up a chair opposite mine, smothered both my hands in his big ones, and began to talk.

"Some day," he said, "when all the railroads are built and my civil engineers go on an eternal vacation and I've nothing to do but cut the coupons the comic papers talk so much about, I'm going to write a book on 'How to Keep Home Happy.' It's true that I haven't been altogether happy myself, but it isn't always the

proprietor of happiness who can best analyze the sources of his possession. There's no one to blame, except possibly myself. I should have ruled things with a stronger hand. When I saw love fading into affection, and affection into respectful regard, I could have checked it, but I had not the perspective of to-day. I let it go, and to-day your mother and I are as isolated in spirit as though we dwelt on separate planets. Love is built, poets to the contrary, on perfect comprehension, implicit or expressed. We started with it—your mother and I. God knows where it is now.

"You know something of the life that has absorbed me. I have lived and breathed railroads. I have loved to see them grow—have delighted to see them stretch out their long black arms into new countries—have smiled to see them touch desolate lands with the activity, prosperity, and progress of civilization. Where their iron arms have reached, cities have sprung up in the wilderness, savage wastes have blossomed as the rose, factories hum and children play where once wild beasts roved the forests.

"These things became the breath of my life. They grew upon me with the immensity of the unguessed. I have tried to make her understand, but I did not try hard enough, and when

my feeble efforts failed, instead of redoubling them, I allowed her to drift away into the petty vortex that drew her, and went my own way to the big, gaunt shadows that beckoned me on, inviting me to make them real. And real I have made them, most of them. If I die to-morrow, I've done my share to speed my country to her destiny. Yet—something has gone from my life—something—something that to-day I see for the first time in yours—and if I could turn back the hands of the clock thirty years, it is likely that I should do less for cosmos and more for my own soul."

Dad rose and looked away with an absent light in his eyes.

"It is not easy," he said, sadly; "it is well-nigh impossible to bridge a chasm that every year of thirty has widened by a lifetime. Your mother is not a happy woman. Her life is spent in the vain endeavor to squeeze milk from the heart of granite. It can't be done, and yet she goes on trying.

"Fond of her? Of course I'm fond of her. They tell us there are no ghosts. Don't you believe it ever. Your mother and I are ghosts—mere pale, elusive ghosts of the love of our own dead youth. Fond of her! Of course I am—dear ghost!

"Don't ever become a ghost, dear girl. Strive against it with all your strength. It can be managed, let a worldful of ghosts chatter what they will. Don't ever allow yourself to be persuaded for an instant that anything the world has to offer, be it ever so sweet or brilliant or smart or high, is worth being a ghost. It isn't. I've tried it, and I know."

Poor, dear dad. I couldn't say a word. I could only put one arm around his neck.

As I was passing through the hall to-night on my way to my room to write you this letter, the door of mamma's room was opened and dad stood there.

"Come here, Dot," he said gently, and, taking my hand, he led me in and closed the door.

The room was dimly lighted; mamma sat by an open window, through which the gentle breeze fanned the curtains lazily to and fro. Her head lay back against a dark cushion, and her face was turned to the window. In her folded hands she clutched her handkerchief. Faint as the light was, I could see that her eyes were moist.

Dad led me across the room until we stood by her side; still she kept her face turned away. At last dad spoke:

"We have been talking of you—your mother

and I," he said; "I have acquainted her with your wish to withdraw from your engagement with Mr. Langham."

"I'm so very—very sorry, mamma," I faltered. With her face still averted, she gave a tremulous little sigh. I had never seen her like this before. I fell on my knees at her side.

"Can't you forgive me, mamma?" I pleaded, on the verge of tears myself. One of her hands stole out and took mine; the other raised her handkerchief to her eyes.

"It—it's all right," she said, finally.

Then came another little convulsive sigh that was almost a sob. I gazed, bewildered. Something had touched depths of my mother's nature that I had never seen stirred before. It seemed almost indecent that I should be there to see it. Soon she spoke, but with her face still turned away:

"I don't know why—oh! I've been so blind—so blind! But I never meant you anything but good—if you think I did, I believe—I shall die."

"Dear mamma," I murmured, "you've always been the kindest——"

"Ah, Cynthia, Cynthia—you would have been far better off without me."

"How can you say such things!" I cried. "It

isn't true—not a word of it's true, and I won't hear you say it."

"Well—well," said mamma, wearily, "if it distresses you——"

"It's all my fault, anyway," I broke out, hot with anger at myself. Somehow it hurt me terribly to see my proud, reserved, cold mamma so humbling herself before me. "It would never have happened, if I had had the backbone of a jellyfish. No wonder you misunderstood me when I misunderstood myself. We'll divide the blame, if you like, but I demand my share." Then she turned her wet eyes toward me for the first time, and for the first time in years I kissed my mother on her lips. They trembled as I touched them.

Dad led me to the door again. When there I turned and bade mamma good-night.

"Good-night, dear," she said, but her voice seemed strange and far away. I looked at dad. He smiled, and in his eyes I read that, hand in hand, two wistful ghosts were moving timidly, hopefully, fearfully, back through the mists of thirty years to the days and scenes of the land of youth.

* * * * * *

It's all over now, dearest, and I am free!

"If I have freedom in my love
And in my soul am free——"

What a wonderful freedom it is, to be sure! And sha'n't you be glad, my dear? I know you will. You were dear enough to weep for me when I had not a tear for myself; I know that you'll rejoice with me, now that my heart is so full of gladness.

There wasn't much tragedy about the last step. I couldn't imagine Reggie being tragic, anyhow; but I think the way it happened would have discomfited a Salvini.

This morning I suggested to Reggie that the day was ideal for a spin in his motor-car. (If you say "automobile" he doesn't hear you.) Of course he agreed with me, and in half an hour we were off for Westerly, Reggie most awe-inspiring in his leather armor. I sharpened the axe all the way over, but it wasn't until we were half-way back that I let it fall.

"What do you think," said I, suddenly, apropos of nothing whatever, "of a girl who marries a man she doesn't love?"

"Eh? What?" he stammered. "Why—what the deuce—why do you ask me that?"

"Because I want to know."

"Oh! Why—er—it—it all depends, you know——"

"Depends on what?"

"Oh! hang it! on the—er—the circumstances and all that sort of thing, you know."

"What circumstances?"

"Oh! all the circumstances—lots of 'em—confound it! What the mischief are you cross-examinin' me for, anyhow?"

"You don't seem to know what you do think of her?" Here we struck a hill, and Reggie became deeply absorbed in the operation of changing speed. Presently I went on:

"Well, I'll tell you, Reggie, what I think of her. I think she's using the man very badly, indeed."

"S'pose he likes to be used badly," suggested Reggie, sulkily.

"He won't after the novelty's worn off. It's a thing that gets tiresome."

"But s'pose he cares for her awfully, you know."

"How long do you suppose he could go on doing that, with no response, and still respect himself? Not very long. And then—what?"

The machine slowed up and came to a standstill. With a smothered imprecation, Reggie got out to see why. I sat in the car in total silence. Five minutes passed. Then he got back

to his seat, turned on the power, and away we went. I don't know why.

"S'pose he makes her care for him after a while?" said the grimy Reggie after minutes of silence.

"How many such cases do you know?" I demanded. My *fiancé* was silent. "No," I went on, "she's using him very badly—that's flat."

"Seems to me he's the one to do the kickin' —always s'posin' it's all in the open." The machine stopped again. This time it took minutes with a monkey-wrench to pacify it. Perspiring and weary, Reggie crawled out from under the car and stood looking up at me out of his absurd clothes. He seemed miles away.

"Honestly, Cynthia, don't you care for me a bit—you know the way I mean?"

"Honestly, Reggie," I answered, "I don't."

"Don't you s'pose—" he began, hopefully.

"No—never"—I interrupted him—"it's really no use. What's the use of pretending it is? I'm sorry——"

"Oh! that's all right," he said, sadly; "I never s'posed you would really be willin' to marry me without carin' for me, but I hoped maybe I could make you—oh! well—that's all right." The monkey-wrench slid unnoticed from his dusty

hand. Reggie climbed patiently back into the car and started it.

"You've left the wrench," I reminded him, But he seemed not to hear me. In five miles he made only one remark, and this was it:

"Always wanted to make you care for me—never really wanted anythin' else so much—but I see now I never could—s'pose this is the last drive we'll be takin' together—seems deuced queer, too—oh! well—that's all right."

About two miles from home Reggie suddenly pulled up. I heard somebody whistling merrily across the open field at our left, and, looking over the wall, beheld a solitary man leisurely following in our direction the windings of a tortuous foot-path that led down over the hill.

"Kenton," said Reggie, briefly.

And so it was. In one hand he carried a rod and a creel swung over his shoulder. Seeing us, he mended his pace and shortly leaped the fence and stood beside us.

"Morning, lovely lady," said he, with an exaggerated flourish of his cap.

"The top of it to you," said I.

"What luck?" demanded Reggie, tersely.

"Very poor to-day," responded Mr. Kenton. "There's no creature more notional than a trout—very poor luck to-day. And you—has the

Purple Plague borne you pleasantly over the groaning highway this morning?"

"Poor luck, eh?" repeated Reggie, thoughtfully. "Say, old man, can you drive this machine home?"

"If I have to," smiled Mr. Kenton.

"If you'll lend me your rod, I've a mind to try the trout. I think you'd—er—better take my place—eh?" He surveyed the fisherman gloomily from the elevation of his seat.

Mr. Kenton was insouciance itself.

"If the lady is willing to trust herself to me," he said, blandly. Reggie climbed out and took the rod and the creel. Mr. Kenton leaped into the car and put his hand on the lever.

"Good luck," said he.

"Same to you," said Reggie, with lowering brow. With a roar and a shiver we were off. At the turn in the road I looked back. Reggie was doggedly following the windings of the tortuous foot-path that led up over the hill.

Mr. Kenton and I talked ART all the way home. I remember we agreed that nature is never so lovely as when binding up the wounds that man has given her.

Once more, dear, it is late. Once more, too, through my open windows comes the moan of

the distant surf. But it's an ominous sound no more. I shall lie awake to listen to it long—long into the night. I have a curious fancy that in it I shall find the *motif* I am seeking.

C.

XV

A TELEGRAM

CHEATHAM & Co.,
No. 57½ Broad Street,
New York City.

Hold my C. T. & O. if you have not disposed of it. Will be at your office to-morrow.

R. L. LANGHAM.

XVI

Dear Ralph:

The unbelievable has happened. The girl of all the world has turned to me of all the world. Three days ago it was—three days ago—and I've been all this time getting to tell you about it. Times without number have I taken up my pen, but it refused to write what my brain scarce comprehended. Think of it, dear lad—as I try to, try and try and try once more, and fail to comprehend. Ever since, as a boy, I came to know her, it seemed to me that it must be or else creation trembled. And then it seemed that it could never be. And now it is to be, after all.

When things were at their darkest I never wholly despaired, or if I despaired, I set my teeth and swore that if I went down it would be with colors flying and guns booming to the last. And now—and now—I am overwhelmed with the wonder of it all. My cup runneth over, indeed.

It isn't her star-like beauty, though God knows that's an imperial gift in itself; it isn't

her buoyant spirit, like unto that of Ariel himself; nor is it the fathomless depth of her wondrous tenderness; no, it is none of these things nor all of them that make up a happiness that almost appals me. It is the knowledge, almost incredible even when her own lips tell me so, that she trusts them all—all and more—to my keeping forever and ever. Is it possible that time or death or heaven or hell or depths or heights can ever really separate us? If it is, will you tell me why we were ever born?

Do you wonder, old fellow, sitting there by the open window that I know so well in that far-off ancient city of Dead Sea fruit, do you wonder that I take these first steps timidly in this misty, rosy land, whose farthest horizon is only its briefest beginning? Do you wonder that I walk with ecstatic fear and trembling lest I faint from breathing the Olympic air of this new land, all roses and wine as it is? Do you wonder that the summer dawn finds me searching the waters of my heart as never before, sounding their depths and shallows with the plummet of brutal honesty and sighing impotently that the shallows are so many and the depths so few? Yet so it is. If I had only known from the first, it seems to me that I might somehow have gotten together the riches of life

to lay at her feet, but, as it is (the irony of love), I never saw myself so little and so worthless until I yearned so much for her sake to be great and well worth while. Yet one thing I know full well, and it is my one resource, no matter what wealth of heart and soul I might be able to bring her it would all be as paltry baubles to what I wish for her. The best in time or eternity would not seem good enough. Thus the knowledge that I could never be satisfied for her makes me now the less dissatisfied.

Here it is, dear lad, the fairest, tenderest, purest human soul the Great Cause ever sent to Earth; free, untamed, unbound, unhindered, it has flown to my arms; it nestles against my breast, confides itself and all its innocence to my care, secure, content, and trustful. And I? How shall I requite it? Try? Heaven knows that I'll do nothing else all the days of my life. Mortality is a wondrous thing, but now—if I could only be a god! A god! With all a god's power to charm and all a god's power to shield from every harm and every evil. Mistakes? I know that I shall make them. The knowledge fills me with an awful dread. But maybe she'll remember, then, that I am only a poor, blind mortal. Let her, then, be tender with my blindness and gentle with my stupidity and forgiv-

ing with my blunders. Heavenly maid! I know she will, and the knowledge gives me courage, for love means nothing if it means not the power to forgive.

But I forget—these first steps in this strange and beautiful country have so bewildered my brain—you must be told the manner in which I came to take them, for, so I promised in the beginning.

Three days ago, when I was moving in quite another sphere, yes, quite another universe, far —far from the gates of this Paradise—I was sitting upon the garden-wall reading Browning before breakfast. Indigestible fare for such an hour, you may say. That's because you take the current verdict without analysis. Anything more digestible than "The Last Ride Together" I do not remember in literature. Well, as I read, presently I heard the thud of hoofs, and, looking up, beheld the trap drawn by the princely Rex and driven by Watkins. Beside him sat our hated rival. At a word from him Watkins pulled up.

"Whither away so early in the morn?" quoth I, not that I cared a hang, but it made talk.

"N' York," quoth he, in surly fashion.

"Interesting city," said deponent. "When do you return?"

"Damn the city! I'm goin' to look after my C. T. & O."

"Thought you'd sold it," said I.

"S'pose I have?" retorted Reggie, defiantly.

"I'm willing to suppose anything you like. What follows?"

"I'm goin' to look after my C. T. & O.," he repeated.

"All right," said I. "Very well. You are. To be sure you are. Why not? Eh? Why not?"

"Drive on, Watkins," quoth Reggie.

The trap rolled away.

Cynthia was not visible at breakfast. There were some other people there. I forget who they were. The day passed. I don't remember how. I didn't see her until dinner-time. All during that function she was perfectly radiant —so gay and light of spirit that it made me fairly heartsick. Dinner was rather more than usually formal that evening. In addition to Miss Caroline, Mr. Fenwick (did I tell you Cynthia's papa, the "railroad king," had arrived?) and Miss Caroline's other guests, of whom I have informed you, the Padelfords, mother and son, and Greene Higbie, the polo player, were present. At Miss Caroline's right sat Mr. Fenwick. On his right was Polly Cheatham. Next came yours to command, and upon my right sat

Cynthia, while beyond her sat the aforesaid Higbie, a good-looking youth of twenty-four or five, all shoulders and tan.

With the soup (of course, I mean when the soup came, you idiot), I touched Polly's elbow, and, under cover of some rapid-fire chaff at the other end of the table, I inquired:

"Did you send Reggie away this time?"

"No, indeed," said she. "But I saw him depart. He didn't appear pleasant. Moreover, he said he wasn't coming back."

"That's sad," said I, and I comprehended Reggie's matutinal temper. "Business, I suppose?"

"So he said; but it's none of mine."

"Nor mine."

"Do you really think so?"

"I really fear so."

"O, we're all like your little polo-ball, Mr. Higbie," lamented the tearful voice of Mrs. Denton-Gibbs. "Round and round the field of life we go, driven here and there, quite independent of our own will, by the great player whose name is Fate. Eh? Mr. Kenton?"

> "'God's puppets, best and worst
> Are we: there is no last or first,'"

quoth I, full of my Browning.

"Oh, do you believe that really?" inquired the voice of Cynthia, and, as I turned, I saw that her gay eyes were troubled. "Do you really believe we're only a Punch and Judy show?"

"Not enough to prevent me from trying most exceedingly for what I want," said I.

"Oh," she said, with something like a sigh of relief. "I'm glad of that. I can't imagine any belief worse than Fatalism. It takes the joy all out of living. If what's to be will be in any event, why not fold our hands and wait for what will come whether we wait or not? And if we can't do things, accomplish things — achieve things—what's the use of living?"

"A good many people, sad people, with gray, old hearts, would tell you that there isn't any."

"That must be because they've lost the one thing great they've striven for—wealth, ambition, love—whatever it may have been."

"And the greatest of these—" said I, under my breath.

She looked at me oddly from under her lashes just a fraction of a second and turned to Higbie.

"What's your idea, Mr. Higbie?" she said. "When you're riding after a ball, do you believe that Fate has predestined whether you're to hit it or not?"

"I think," retorted Higbie, "it depends more on what I've been doing the night before."

"But was it not predestined, in turn, what you were to do the night before?"

"Why, I could have gone to bed, you know," objected Higbie.

"He admits he didn't," interposed Mr. Fenwick. Everybody laughed, and Higbie grew red.

"Well, anyhow," he replied, "this Fatalism has one good point. If I didn't go to bed——"

"Oh, come now," from several.

"If I didn't go to bed it wasn't my fault. Fate would have it that Archie Newman was giving his bachelor dinner that night."

"Then again," pursued Cynthia, "you might have gone to bed even then, but Fate would have it that you didn't want to."

"Just so," said Higbie, gratefully; "many thanks."

"Now," said Mrs. Fenwick, from across the table, "now we are getting somewhere. Let us now approach the doctrine of the freedom of the will. Undoubtedly the course of human events is largely determined by the action of human will, but is it true that the action of that will is, in its turn, predetermined by some power, which we may call Fate or Destiny or God or the First Cause or X + Y, or anything you like?"

"Well, Miss Caroline," remarked Mrs. Padelford, as the planked shad made its crisp and fragrant appearance, "all I can say is that Fate appears to be a most excellent chef."

"Fate is a Democrat," replied Miss Caroline. "World-making is not too high nor cookery too low for its consideration."

"Dare you to say that to the cook," said I. "Fate would send you a new one instanter."

"On the contrary," observed Mr. Fenwick, ignoring my imbecility. "Fate and I were both Republican at the last presidential election."

"Is it true," I inquired, "that Fate is venal? Would it, for example, sell its vote?"

"You'll have to ask Mr. Everson," answered the railroad king. "He's been lieutenant-governor of New York and—therefore an expert in moral turpitude."

Miss Caroline's brother broke off his *tête-à-tête* with Mrs. Padelford.

"There were several members of the State Senate over which I had the honor of presiding," said he, "who were accused of having accepted passes over one of our principal railroads." A smiling tableful looked at Mr. Fenwick. The latter had apparently forgotten the existence of everybody save Polly. With his eyes fixed upon her, he inquired casually:

"Do you like sausages?"

I don't know why I'm giving you all this. It's nothing to do with the case. But when I get started on a picture I revel in details. That's your criticism on my water-colors, I believe, and you are, as usual, quite correct. Etching is really my line, if I have one.

Well, the evening passed somehow. The French windows opened upon the veranda—and the company circulated, now indoors and now out. Polly sang a little, among other things that maddening:

> "O who would stand on 'If I might'
> Or wait on 'If I could.'"

Young Higbie played the piano and played it right well, too. 'Twas amazing—the dexterity and delicacy of his big, sinewy hands. Young Padelford had brought his violin, and, of course, the second nocturne of our old friend Chopin was on the programme. The circumstances were ideal for it—the lush, fragrant summer air, the gentle breeze in the pines, the obligato of the mournful whippoorwill. I listened to it, secluded in a far corner of the veranda. A gentle rustle announced the approach of Cynthia. Her footfall was noiseless.

"Why so pensive?" she inquired, and her voice was like the violin's.

"Just my sense of the eternal fitness of things," I replied. "The second nocturne, you know." Cynthia was silent a long time. Silence between us has somehow never been embarrassing. At last she spoke, casually.

"Did you know that we are leaving Belleville to-morrow—mother, father and I?" How grateful I was for the darkness.

"Well, you might at least pretend to be sorry," she murmured at length.

"No," said I. "I couldn't."

"Aunt Clara isn't well," she explained, "and mamma thinks we ought to go to her. Papa has to go back to town—there's a directors' meeting or something. I'm awfully sorry to go." I rallied.

"No wonder Reggie isn't coming back."

"O, you think that's the reason?" inquired Cynthia, lightly.

"Isn't it?" said I.

"Hm! How about C. T. & O.?" she asked.

> "My bed is like a little boat,
> Nurse tucks me in when I embark."

crooned the voice of Polly. We heard the song through.

"We ought to get back to the rest," said Cynthia, stirring in her chair.

"Wait a moment," said I, hastily. "What time do you go?"

"Some time in the afternoon."

"Do you ever take early morning walks any more?" I inquired. Cynthia waited just long enough to show that she was considering. I held my breath.

"Sometimes," she murmured.

We went back "to the rest."

I had the same nightmare six times that night. I dreamed that I had slept till noon. The last time I awoke with that agonizing idea it was a trifle before six o'clock and sunshine and rose-breath and bird-song were streaming through my window. For the first time the hideous thought occurred to me that it might have rained!

Haste was the principal characteristic of my toilet. Heavens! Suppose I should keep her waiting! No one but the servants was astir as I went down-stairs, through the hall and out into the summer morning. Never before was the air so sweet, or the misty salt marshes so alluring, or the far-off sea so gayly melancholy. Haven't you seen the time when the mountains or the sea or the forest seemed all instinct with a knowledge of your inmost heart—yes, and a knowledge, too, of fatal things that awaited you just

beyond the curtain of the narrow present. Still, voiceless, sad, mysterious, they lay afar off and regarded you with all the melancholy and the pity of the infinite for the finite—the illimitable for the atom. Yes, the great old sea knew, sleeping out there in the morning sunlight, just as it had known a million, million times before. It knew—it knew—but it could not tell—it would not tell.

And yet its majestic beauty was to my eyes overlaid with a mournfulness equalled only by its own profundity. Beautiful? Yes—yes—wondrously beautiful, but with all the beauty of sorrow, there was heart-break in its every wave. It whispered melancholy as it laved the shining sand so far away and its voice came ominous to my ears.

At the rusty little bridge that crosses the stream down behind the stables I waited for Cynthia. Would she come? Almost I hoped she wouldn't. I recalled the pitch of her voice when she had answered through the darkness "Sometimes," and I knew that she had not then made up her mind. Almost I hoped she wouldn't come; yet how my heart leaped up when I saw her. All in her sea blue she was—with her white arms bare to the elbows and her hatless hair shining in the caressing sunlight. Those

slender, blue-stockinged ankles twinkled again as she tripped down the hillside to the bridge.

"Was ever such a morning?" she saluted me joyously.

"The worst I remember," said I. And then I started. The wondrous, gold-bronze hair was starred with forget-me-nots. She flushed a little under my gaze and, dropping her eyes, started across the bridge.

In absolute silence we pursued our way across the dewy fields. My eyes were on the ground—my heart was in the hollow of my hand. You remember our adventure with Minerva? Well, in due time we came to that same field. Since the affair with our bovine friend I had tried a dozen times to paint that field. It was made for a water-color, composition, color contrast, background—everything. I can praise, but somebody else will have to paint it. But if ever I paint a portrait of Cynthia I shall go to that field to do it.

Implicitly our journey was to the beach, but when we came to the stone wall that bounds that field Cynthia sat down upon the top of it and gayly swung her little feet.

"I can never go by here without stopping," she laughed. I sat down in the grass at the foot of the wall and nursed my knee.

"Where is the Goddess of Contentment this morning?" she asked.

"She grazes afar to-day," I answered. "It's just as well."

"Ingrate!" she laughed.

"She couldn't help me to-day," I returned. Cynthia ignored my pessimism.

"Aren't you lucky not to have to go away?" she said.

"No," said I, shortly.

"O, please, please do cheer up, Mr. Kenton," she said. "I think you might, when it's my last day here."

"Your logic," I said, gloomily, "is distinctly feminine." She frowned a moment, and then broke into a peal of her tinkling laughter.

"Oh, of course," she said, "I shouldn't like you to be glad because I'm going away."

"You know why I'm so sorrowful," said I.

"But I don't, though."

"I told you—about that fellow with the bow and arrow, you know."

"Oh, to be sure—you're sad because you can't tell her. Why—" (she looked at the sea.) "Why don't you, anyhow?"

"It wouldn't be honorable of me."

"Wouldn't it, really?"

"No."

"Maybe she'd think it was."

"No—I'm sure she wouldn't. She is the most honorable among women—and the dearest."

"Oh, of course, she's the dearest."

"Well—oughtn't she to be?"

"What foolish questions you ask, Mr. Kenton! Of course she ought to be."

"Then why did you sneer?"

"Did I sneer?"

"Humph!"

Cynthia regarded me quizzically from the top of the wall.

"Will you come and see me when we get back to town?" she asked. I thought her eye twinkled.

"No," I answered, brutally. "I will not."

"No? Don't you like me any more?"

I evaded the question.

"I am going to Paris," I said. Cynthia smiled in a way most irritating. I had hoped that she would frown.

"Don't you like me any more?" she repeated, burying her adorable nose in a handful of buttercups she had gathered by the way.

"Yes," said I, crossly, "I do. But I shouldn't come to see you if I didn't go back to Paris."

"Why not, pray?" said Cynthia, innocently. It was maddening.

"Because," said I, rising, and dusting my knees, "because I don't like Reggie. Let's get along." But Cynthia did not stir. Instead, she began to pick the petals off the buttercups, one by one.

"Is that," she said, softly, her eyes still on the flowers, "is that really the reason?" I stood, miserably twisting my hat.

"Yes," I groaned, "that's really the reason—or part of it. I shall go back to Paris or Tuscaloosa or Hong Kong—or somewhere—and regret to the end of my life that ever I saw you." Cynthia raised her eyes and looked out at the sea. She seemed so very, very far away.

"Do you really—really mean it?" she said at last, in an odd, elfin tone that I had never known her use before. The burden of many heartsick months was upon me.

"God knows I do," said I. "Let's get on."

Cynthia dropped the flowers and put out her hand to me.

"I think we'd better go home," she said, in a low voice, with her eyes on the ground.

"But—but we haven't finished our walk," I cried, in my panic.

Obstinately she repeated the phrase:

"If you please, I'd rather go home." I came close and looked at the lowered eyelids. Moisture glistened on the soft bronze lashes.

"Cynthia—Cynthia," I whispered, "I've hurt you—I didn't mean to do it. I'm the clumsiest boor in a worldful of boors. I'm—oh! I'm anything you like, if only you'll forgive me—out of your great, sweet heart—forgive me. I'm so clumsy—so awkward! Forgive me! I shall never forgive myself!" I tried to take her hand, but she drew it away and turned aside. I thought she would have left me there. Instead she murmured:

"Are you going back to Paris?"

"No—no—no," I said. "I ought, but—God knows I can't."

"And you will come to see me?"

"Cynthia, you know I cannot stay away!"

Slowly she turned, slowly the long, bronze lashes rose, slowly she lifted the violet eyes to mine. Read those words again, old fellow. I wonder if you know what they mean. Two words she said, and her voice was like the whisper of the breeze in the pines:

"Stupid Jack!" she said. I moved in her direction.

"Why, there's Perkins," she said, hurriedly,

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